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Architecture as Evocation of Place
Thoughts on An Architectural "Beginning" in Bangladesh

by Kazi Khaleed Ashraf

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Abstract:

This thesis is a trajectory of a quest of trying to understand certain fundamental notions of architecture, triggered initially by the cultural conditions of Bangladesh: How does an architectural position really find 'validation'? What is the significant meaning of architectural "appropriateness"? And, how does an artifact fit into place? The key idea of the investigation is that place is not merely a physical but also a psychic reality; it is the basic strata of "collective consciousness" that provides identity and psychic security. Place denotes an 'existential structure', formed by material and immaterial entities, in the palpable, the conscious and the 'unconscious' realm, from which its dwellers draw the meaning and relevance of their collective action and existence. In the study here, it is argued that it is the role of architecture to "concretize" or "exteriorize" this 'existential structure', and thus reinforce the dimension of place. Place, as a continuous repository of "artifacts" and "human events", can provide the instrumental and material tool for the making of such architecture.

The investigation, in conclusion, attempts to find how can the repository be tapped, within the domain of design, so that not only the immaterial dimension is engaged, but also the 'new' artifact evokes and becomes a new deposit to the place-repository.

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1

Introduction
When Ritwik Ghatak, a noted film director, returned to Bangladesh, his original homeland, after nearly thirty years of absence, this is how he described the reunion: "... [W]e were flying [to Bangladesh]...Satyajit Babu was by my side. When we began crossing the Padma [1], I cried like a child. You haven’t seen that Bangladesh..... the full life, the harmony... I already felt I had alighted deep into the heart of that life [I had left behind].... it seemed everything was still the same, time had stood still" [2]. Beneath what seems to be an overt sentiment lies a deep affiliative bond with a place which charges not only an individual’s memory but the whole sense of being. I began my “thesis” with the same ‘sense of affiliation’ but only with a vague idea what that denotes spiritually, intellectually and, of course, architecturally.

The cultural conditions of Bangladesh, particularly the architectural culture, instigated the more conscious portion of this enquiry: How does an architectural proposition attain an ‘authentic’ legitimacy? What is the significant meaning of the notion of “appropriateness” in architecture? How does an architectural project fit into place? It seemed that architectural intentionality is always trying to mediate with something. It is something which is not just site nor the larger physical context (city, or parts of it, for example). It is also not stylistic or formal adjustment, nor utilitarian or aesthetic propriety; it is something which appeared to me, intuitively, to be deeply fundamental and, yet, nebulous. It strongly seemed that artifacts and the place in which it is set (with all its notional ambiguity, at this point) are intrinsically linked together. I also realized that ‘the deep affiliative bond with a place’ which Ritwik Ghatak experienced, and which echoed within me too, and the very fundamental notion of architecture make an inextricable intersection. It is this non-palpable realm, where the ‘concreteness’ of the building, diffuses into an immaterial existence, that I wanted to explore. It is, to use an observation of E.V. Walter [3], an attempt to unite the sight with insight.

1. The Ganges, as it is known in India, is called the Padma when it flows through Bangladesh.


1. Map of the Indian sub-continent
Although investigating the notion of Place was triggered by the particular conditions of Bangladesh, and my struggle to articulate an architectural position within it, the “thesis” has more than often veered away from the specifics of the Bengali context to indulge in other ‘universal’ realms.

II

A short description of the historical condition, and the recent intellectual and architectural climate of Bengal/Bangladesh may be necessary to locate contextually the origin of my arguments [4].

The cultural state of Bengal can best be explained not only by its deltaic landscape and the people’s legendary struggle with it, but by the spatial location of Bengal between two worlds. With the Himalayan mountains in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south forming a territorial discontinuity, it is Bengal, where the land-bulge of the Indian sub-continent contracts, which forms an edge not only to the Indian domain but probably also to one which originates in the Arabic heartland. At the same time, Bengal forms the western edge of the other complex racial and cultural continuity which extends from Burma to Indonesia, and reaches up to China.

The implication is that a simple monocultural look cannot completely explain the Bengali psyche; an explanation would have to include the complex historical layering and interpenetration of diverse phenomena that such a special spatial location entails. As a convenient beginning one could make the observation that there have been four decisive conditions in the cultural history of the sub-continent: the Dravidian, the Sanskrit-Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and Colonial-European [5]. It is also important to point out that each of these conditions were enacted with different energy in each region of the sub-continent; and, they were not necessarily played out in a linear chronological sequence. Also, the dominance of a particular condition did not always mean the complete obliteration of the others.


5. The idea of a four strata was suggested by Mr. Kamil Khan Muntaz during a discussion at Lahore, Pakistan (1987).
Bengal, for example, retained the Dravidian culture much longer, and probably much more, than the north and west of India where the Aryans penetrated first and laid their first bastion. It was the Aryan-Sanskrit culture which gave rise to Hinduism and then to Buddhism, and which flourished all over the sub-continent. Bengal became an important center for Buddhist monastic and cultural activities, and it was through Bengal that Buddhist philosophy was introduced to Burma and subsequently lands east to it (the 8th century Paharpur monastery in north Bangladesh, for example, serve as typological origin of such later structures as Angkor Wat, etc.). This transmission was particularly hastened by the ascendancy of a Hindu revivalism.

Islam also came to India from the west transmitted through the medium of the Turko-Persian culture, on one hand, and the Arab culture, on the other. In the north and west of India (again the early bastions of Islam), the mode of the Turko-Persian culture, although "Indianized" later, retained a great distinctiveness because of the proximity of these cultures to India, greater settling by Turks and Persians, and the directness of the political and military conquests in unsettling the Hindu domination. The coming of Islam in Bengal had a different dynamic: it occurred within lesser political and societal upheaval as compared to the north, and a significant proportion of the first Muslims were really Bengalis and not only settlers. In such circumstances there was greater possibility of the transformation of the ancient consciousness of the place than a total obliteration.

The European political, and eventually cultural, domination of the sub-continent was the single most decisive event which affected every cultural and religious group, and which still continues to be the point of departure for understanding contemporary conditions.

Nearly two hundred years of close contact with Europe, vis-a-vis the colonial rule, has irreversibly changed all aspects of the Bengali life; the cultural conditions, and, most importantly, the mental state. While the colonial economic order has been the most decisive in making this
'total' rupture with the pre-colonial past, it is also true that the exposure to contemporary European 'libertarian and progressive' thinking revealed some dogmatic and repressive aspects of Bengali and Indian societies. The English presence generated a paradoxical and contradictory tension in Bengali life: an explicit passion for retaining the semblance of the ancient culture (at its worst, romantic-nostalgia, and, at its best, 'modern' nationalism and a renascence of Bengali cultural spirit); and, at the same time, finding a gateway to the ideals and ideologies of European 'modernism'. It is this dual sensibility which charged the core of intellectual domain when it began to organize itself, in the contemporary sense, at the end of 19th century. The sentiments of Rabindranath Tagore expressed in the 1920s give firm evidence of this:

"When we talk of Indian art it indicates some truth based upon the Indian tradition and temperament. At the same time we must know that there is no such thing as caste restriction in human cultures; they ever have the power to combine and produce new variations, and such combinations have been going on for ages proving the truth of the deep unity of human psychology."

"There was a time when human races lived in comparative segregation and therefore the art adventurers had their experience within a narrow range of limits, deeply cut grooves of certain common characteristics. But today that range has vastly widened, claiming from us a much greater power of receptivity than what we were compelled to cultivate in former ages. If today we are a living soul that is sensitive to ideas and to beauty of form, let it prove its capacity by accepting all that is worthy of acceptance, not according to some blind injunction of custom or fashion, but in following one's instinct for eternal value, the instinct which is a God given gift to all real artists. Even then our art is sure to have a quality which is Indian, but it must be an inner quality and not an artificially fostered formalism, and therefore not to be too obtrusively obvious and abnormally self-conscious." [6]

2 and 3. The dynamics of land, water and vegetation.
Religious reform (mainly Hindu) and literature were the first to be moved by these dynamics: Raja Rammohan Roy and Rabindranath Tagore became heroic figures in taming this tension in their respective fields. Maturity in struggle came much later in the visual arts, earlier in painting in the 1900, and much much later in architecture, in the 50s. And, it is this complex dynamics of acceptance and resistance which still continue to form a major thrust of intellectual activities.

Architectural tradition, unlike literature and painting, suffered the greatest disruptions because of two reasons: its closer link with the volatile socio-economic realities in the last 300 years, and its physical temporality in Bengali climate (the ravages of the shifting rivers, the awesome vegetation, the ‘fluid’ soil completely destroying many past artifacts and settlements, rendering them into mythic pieces). While disjunction and departure from precursor have formed the trajectory of any culture, in the context of Bengal, it was made particularly traumatic. Unlike the evolutionary and intra-culturally generated departure in most cultures, the colonial disruption in Bengal was violent and from without. The impact of the new economic structure and the capitulation of Bengali elites to European norms; and, the direct avoidance of “native” traditions, and the conscious generation of Euro-centric modes, gradually pushed the existing architectural sensibilities of the place to a subconscious corner of the mind.

If the history of architecture substantially informs design (beside program, construction, global concern, etc.), how can it do so in Bengal when so much remains shrouded either in amnesia or in contradiction? How can architecture be spiritually ‘place-responsive’ in this condition?

III

The structure of the text has been divided into three parts. The first
part looks at the validity and the consequences of the notion of *Place*. Place, in the simplest sense, is understood as the physical and psychic reality which provides identity and a sense of being. The fundamental task of architecture, in these terms, is to provide 'existential foothold' so as to 'concretize' the consciousness of place. The discussion is introduced with a comment on the dissolution of 'place' as a general global phenomenon due to the overwhelming impact of an illusory world culture. The discussion, in addition, hopes to clarify that place-consciousness is not an isolationist parochialism but really a fundamental strata of the collective human desire which must be resolved before we can indulge in the ideal world culture.

The second part involves a discussion of the capacity of architecture to retrieve and reinvest diverse memories. Fatehpur Sikri and the Sultanate Mosques of Bengal are discussed within the perspective of 'architecture as archaeology': that the works have ventured away from the dominant modes of their time but clearly within the dialectics of memory and invention. The idea behind the study is the assertion that contemporary architectural culture in Bangladesh is in an amnesiac state from where it can only make futile gestures. To repossess its fundamental task, architecture now must play an 'archaeological' role: excavate from the debris of confusion its own memory and discover the *reason-for-being*.

In the third part a rationalization of the preceding discussions has been attempted within more architectural terms of reference by surveying a number of contemporary ‘strategies’. The frame of reference is formed by the notion of ‘archetype’, on one hand, and the contemporary idea of typology, on the other. The discussion concludes eventually by looking at recent projects in Bangladesh which, by possessing the germ of place-consciousness, may indicate, within this amnesiac condition, a “beginning”.

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2
The Formation and Deformation of Place
The Monolithic World

The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I shall call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind. The conflict springs up from there. We have this feeling that this single world civilization at the same time exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past.

1. Paul Ricoeur, 

If there is a globally-pervading phenomenon today it is the contradictory situation of an increasing universalization, mostly accompanied by homogenization, of the diverse human entities (cultures) and, at the same time, a resistance to its perpetuation. The phenomenal rise of universalization and its need can be attributed to the unprecedented manner of coming together of nations and cultures which mark the 19th and 20th century. While, to make a meaningful interaction possible between these diverse entities at the level of economic, political and intellectual plane it became necessary to initiate a common communicative structure, it will not be unreasonable to say that the domineering role of European societies, in the last three centuries, laid the principle of that structure. The political domineering role also made it necessary to comprehend complex and mostly unrelated phenomenon and this, in turn, required the making of reductive and homogenizing classification. The global condition, as it is today, a complete economic interdependence of nations, only thrives on this lowest common denominator - the monocultural structure.

One could look at the historical beginning of this phenomenon and highlight the actual intentions of making such operations. Most importantly, we can identify what was actually lost to make this possible. “Orientalism”, for example, is the discipline which originated out of the condition of coming together of disparate cultures, but
it grew mainly as an enterprise Europe had to evolve in its ever widening contact with “other” worlds, and more precisely, in its historic ever increasing domineering role in the “other” worlds. This was enacted to grasp, to know and to make comprehensible a complexity of diverse entities, in order to maintain a politico-economic structure. This also necessitated the creation of a duality: a world here, knowable, and a world out there, unknown and exotic. “Orientalism”, thus, became a cumulative process of knowing, “a triumphant technique for taking the immense fecundity of the Orient and making it systematically, even, alphabetically knowable by Western laymen” [2]. In short, it was laying claims on that vast immensity, a “domestication of the exotic” [3]. The monolith-creating operation, as Edward Said argues, is far from being ‘an innocent knowing’, but is actually a relationship of power and domination, a perpetuation of cultural and political hegemony [4]. There is more often than not an incoherence between what is projected to be known, and what is actually out there. In fact, what is actually out there is often irrelevant in the maintenance of the monolith.

Duality is the fundamental condition by which cultural domination is enacted. The duality, more than often, is forced; maintained, artificially, by craft, fiction and propaganda. The Oriental monolith was principally based on the constantly maintained duality of ‘West’ and ‘East’. The created homogeneity of everything ‘oriental’ became the distinguishing factor from whatever European. The oriental monolith was a sweeping homogenization, and, thus, a devastating reduction of totally disjunctive and distinctive worlds.

While “orientalism”, or the European imperial attitude, thrived on the distinction of West and East (with no important concern for the nature of the sub-distinction within each of these worlds) to validate its reason for being, “Internationalism”, the recent monolithic manifesto of a global reality, based its premise on what it assumed as the fundamentally inherent or growing commonality of the human tribes. Its origin, at the beginning of this century, was in the ever diminishing national and cultural isolation, and consequential increase of interna-

2. Edward Said, Orientalism.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.
4. The "International" city: Boston, Tokyo, Bombay, Cairo?
tional and cultural interactions (League of Nations as the political benchmark of that optimism) as compounded through increasing intercommunication, unprecedented commerce and resource interdependence. Although “internationalism” eliminated the trumped-up duality of East and West, and has been able to maintain its global influence even today about a trans-cultural idea of modernization, it is apparent that the fundamental ideas are substantially Euro-centric.

“Modernism”, often identified as the architectural counterpart of the ‘internationalist’ tendency, found a part of its legitimacy in the euphoria which charged much of the creative activities of the 20s in Europe, and later in other cultures, and in the belief that the world was really one single entity, and that an international mode was not only possible but was imperative. Whether all the ideological positions and the architectural projects were completely charged by this global outlook is still a matter of research, but it now seems that the phenomenon of “modernism” in architecture was itself a monolith, formulated by historians and critics, more than by the architects, on the one hand, to grasp the complex nature of events that had divergent historical origin and consequences, and, on the other hand, to offer a globally prescriptive ‘antidote’. Multifarious ideologies were forcibly made to converge to construct a homogeneous ideal. Duality was obviously automatically propounded: what is existing, what is ‘traditional’ is categorically obsolete; and, what is new, what is visionary is the salvation. The existing was targeted as the arch-enemy for the validation of the vision. “...[I]t seems clear that by the late 18th century the constructed duality was no longer put forth (as it long had been) as a stimulant of debate and reflection or as a metaphorical device, but as literal vehicle for the production of a monolithic and prescriptive world view” [5].

While in the region of its origin, i.e, in Europe, the prescription had to do with ideological domination, in other regions it unwittingly became a vehicle for cultural domination, and, as some critics would suggest, an ally for post-colonial machinations. More unwittingly, most architects in non-European cultures, from the 1940s, adopted

5. Ibid.
5. The "Islamic" city: Cairo, Karachi, Dhaka, Kuala Lumpur?
the "internationalist" mode completely uncritically. It is interesting to note that the tentative breach attempted by a limited number of architects outside Europe in breaking away from the encrusting mode and making their work more culture-specific was 'appreciably' identified in the European architectural literature as "regional diversity" [6]. But works which were 'grammatically' not identifiable with "modernism" was either provincial or retrogressive. Aldo Van Eyck admitted as early as in 1962 that "Western civilization habitually identifies with civilization as such on the pontifical assumption that what is not like it is a deviation, less advanced, primitive, or, at least, exotically interesting at a safe distance" [7]. The late international recognition of Geoffrey Bawa and Hassan Fathy testifies to the persistence of this monolithic perception.

The dilemma of common denominators, of trans-cultural traits that would not be contradicted by localized factors, also plague the quest for an "Islamic" architecture, often an obvert alternative to "modernism". Was there an "Islamic" art? Is an "Islamic" art possible? The issue is made particularly sensitive by the adjective Islam. While the term "Islamic" correctly denotes the tenets of the faith, it does not reconcile many issues when transposed to explain all the myriad of artistic (and architectural) enterprises carried on by Muslims in diverse parts of the world.

A conceptual understanding of the formation and nature of "Islamic" art has still not found unanimity among scholars. Oleg Grabar in *The Formation of Islamic Art* reveals the difficulty in formulating the conceptual framework that will embrace the arts of the people from Morocco to Malaysia, from the 8th to the 20th century. Early European scholars actually coined the term "Islamic" to classify a group of work that appeared to be morphologically and iconographically coherent. Clearly, this was the domain of the Turko-Persian-Arabic culture, and, as one moved eastward, it seemed that mere morphological correspondence did not suffice. Scholars sought a more abstract term of reference assuring that the particular 'state of mind' that Islam invoked, which is independent of geographical location,
produced “Islamic” art [8]. This has an implication that an “Islamic” mind is completely acultural, ahistorical and atemporal, and that the time of formation of “Islamic” art in a particular place, a unique moment happening at a particular time in that place, but paradoxically making it timeless and placeless. It can be argued that the generative structure of this ‘state of mind’ is derived from an intricate coalition of a pure, religious core (unquestionable dictates as laid out in the Koran), and a more cultural zone (phenomena, beliefs and rituals that have evolved from within ancient and new Arabia). When such a ‘state of mind’ is sought after in non-Arab lands, it is not clear where an idealism is generated by religious beliefs and where a subtle Arab cultural imposition starts.

Mohammad Arkoun, on the other hand, identifies the historical role of Islam, when it spread across societies as diverse as Indonesia or Morocco, as religious, and not ideological and inimical to existing specific cultures, as it is today. Arkoun says, “... (in history) Islam didn’t impose any constraints to the deep structures of societies... Islam has spread in different societies like Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Arabic societies. Why? Because Islam left people to create their culture, to create their environment according to the deepest level of their own culture. This worked in this manner until Islam was used as an ideological weapon to answer the aggressions of the West” [9]. Although, Arkoun sees the transformation of Islam from its ancient function, which was religious, to a mono-cultural, ideological function, a result of recent political and historical events, he also identifies it as a barrier to understanding the historical operation of Islam in diverse societies, and as a “negation of history and the disguising of procedures in order to transform social, psychological, political realities into idealised images of the eternal Message” [10].

It may now be possible to formulate the nature and consequences of such monolithic operations:
1) The perspective is inherently global and supra-regional, the implications always political and hegemonical, and, the mechanism always generalized and reductive - subsuming, if not suppressing, the incidents and phenomena termed ‘local’.

2) In the ‘monocultural’ perspective, there is always a center which is the source of the generative principles, and a periphery where such principles are ‘adopted’. A closer scrutiny will reveal, in most cases, a correspondence with a politically hegemonical center and a dominated periphery.

3) In the schemata, specific and singular phenomena are looked at as anomalies and abnormalcies (as categorisation in various ‘academic’ art history will attest). And, as we shall see, these phenomena are actually particularities of places.

4) So, in the zealous, rhetorical promulgation of monolithic Idea and Ideology what is particularly dissolved and lost is the more fundamental material of human cognition - the specific quality of Place; and, this is what Paul Ricoeur identifies as the ‘subtle destruction of the creative nucleus of great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life’. 
6. The formation of place: origin.
The Formation of Place

While "the apparent importance of place, both functionally and existentially, has not been reflected in examinations of either the concept of place or of the nature of experience of place" [1], it is the contention of this investigation that place, with all its notional ambiguity, is the key to the formation of architecture.

What is place? As Donlyn Lyndon says, by places "we mean both something obvious and something more esoteric. Places are where we put things, where we go, where events become actual - where they take place.... Places are spaces that can be imagined, that can be known" [2]. In its immediate implication, at least in the English usage, it denotes a physical tangibility: "where we go", a recognizable space-entity, the site, the physical context.

A large range of concepts and notions are compressed within the term place as used in the English language (one is aware of the possibility of difference in usage and the probability of greater conceptual clarity in other languages). The expansiveness of the concept is useful in containing the total range as each of them seems to be valid for certain perspective and are intricately related; at the same time, the profusion of concepts makes it impossible to construct a comprehensive definition. For the sake of discussion one could make a simplified distinction of place having a physical and psychic dimension; it is the latter which is the focus of this enquiry. It is the notion of Place, as an 'immaterial psychic reality' which we as dwellers in the place adhere to, umbilically belong to, and fall back upon in some sort of maternal security, which is the concern of this investigation.

Place as psychic 'reality'

In another perspective, place seems to be a confluence of three entities - - terrain, time and man-community (society). While terrain or the geographical place is the primary material of place formation

7. Place as a triangular confluence of time, terrain and events.
because human events and actions have to occur in a place (and, also the physical aspects of the terrain have much to do in forming the primordial response in its dwellers, or as some would argue, they even shape our ‘world-view’), the ultimate meaning of Place does not come from location. Neither does it come from human events and actions alone, which man as a societal unit enacts, but which do add to the character of the place. The impossibility of the instantaneous formation of place, and the continuous dynamics of the opposing changing and persistent characteristics, as ushered by human, and to some degree, natural actions, constitute time as another important factor. Also, time becomes an intrinsically important issue when we talk of experience of, association and attachment to place.

Dardel’s idea of place as the space in which “human intention inscribes itself on the earth”[3] encapsulates this triangular confluence. It denotes place as a human signification, as ‘a centre of action and intention’[4], as ‘focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence’ [5]. To paraphrase Relph:

The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence. There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world [6].

The odyssey of man on earth (in the biblical tradition) begins with a sense of abandonment; he is basically “forlorn” [7]. As an existentialist like Jean-Paul Sartre would say, a man is a “lonely anguished being in an ambiguous world”. The existentialist argument would further continue that man is thrown into the world, not set into a place fashioned for him beforehand by an all-seeing, all-powerful and benevolent Deity. The circumstance of human life has not been so arranged that man can discover what he is, what is expected of him, what he can hope for. The human condition has not been defined in


4. Relph, Place and Placelessness, p.42.


6. Relph, p.43.

these most critical respects by the Superbeing. Man cannot discover these things because they have not been settled beforehand: he must invent them. He must Will. Therefore, man must locate himself. It is a deep-seated urge deriving from a primordial (sub-)consciousness. And, to locate himself, he must take possession of earth, dwell, find a place. "Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build."[8]

The cerebral construction of the geo-psychic place is the original endeavour of man, and predates the first action of any human group. It could begin with the placing of the first stake on the ground, or before, in a more psychic possession of the land, as for example the Masais in East Africa, about whom Isak Dinesen writes:

The Masai when they were moved from their old country, north of the railway line, to the present reserve, took with them the names of their hills, plains, and rivers, and gave them to the hills, plains, and rivers in the new country. It is a bewildering thing to the traveller. The Masai were carrying their cut roots with them as a medicine[9].

Again, according to Heidegger, ‘place’ places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality’. Only when an outline of the existential frame has been erected can the sojourn of man begin. “We could also say that human existence is qualified by the insoluble unity of life and place”[10].

The human consciousness

In the symbolic ‘possession’ of the physical world what has so far been merely implied but what truly lies at the core of the discourse is the close relationship between human consciousness and the formation of place. A systematic and scientific enquiry of human consciousness, being one of the least accessible human characteristics to trace, has begun only in recent times. It is a fact that any living thing
with a brain may have some degree of consciousness but it is only human beings which have a stream of internal dialogue between the senses, reporting on the outside world, the self, the me. “Self-awareness and the capacity to dream, imagine, remember and create are the hall marks of humanity, all are components of what we call human consciousness”[11].

While human consciousness, in the ‘technical’ sense, denotes the state of an individual when his faculties of seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, etc. are functioning normally; and, collective consciousness, in the socio-cultural sense as used by Durkheim, denotes “not the mere sum total of all given elements in all the individual consciousness of a society, but the engendering through associative activities within the constraints of specific collective conditions, of new elements of human experience, knowledge, value, will, and behaviour” [12], it is not clear in the neurological or psychological sense, in either of individual or collective consciousness, how far down the ‘scale’ is it correct to ascribe conscious functioning.

It is mainly to Sigmund Freud we owe to opening up for rational enquiry that vast untractable domain we may call the unconscious. However, Freud’s identification of the unconscious as a generic human, not cultural, characteristic, and as a deposit of forgotten or suppressed guilt conscience, experience and desire in an individual, ultimately was felt to be too constrictive a generalization. It was Carl Gustaf Jung who posited the notion of a ‘collective unconscious’ as ‘the past experience of the human species, which has been built into the inherited brain structure, and which manifests itself in the recurrent phenomenon of the archetypes’[13]. Jung also argued that an individual’s functioning is the product of this collective unconscious whose contents are forgotten, repressed, subliminally perceived, thought, and felt matter of every kind; he also suggested the balance between the conscious and the unconscious as the most desirable condition. While Jung talks of the archetypal storage as a human condition, he is ambiguous about the cultural manifestation, when it is probable that it is the cultural formation of the unconscious, as a

Between Silence and Light, sketch by Louis Kahn.
continuous summation of primordial response to the terrain, the subsequent human events, the engendered myths and legends, which structure the intrinsic notion of place.

The tangible and the intangible

One can think of art as the conscious struggle to make more meaningful these two complementary, and not necessarily conflicting, dimensions of human reality. One is then reminded of Louis Kahn, as the philosopher, who evidently saw architecture as a meeting of the measurable and the unmeasurable:

Inspiration is the feeling of beginning at the threshold where Silence and Light meet. Silence, the unmeasurable, desire to be, desire to express, the source of new need, meets Light, the measurable, giver of all presence, by will, by law, the measure of things already made, at a threshold which is inspiration, the sanctuary of art, the Treasury of Shadow. The artist offers his work to his art in the sanctuary of all expression, which I like to call the Treasury of the Shadow, lying in that ambiance: Light to Silence, Silence to Light. Light, the giver of presence, casts its shadow, which belongs to Light. What is made belongs to Light and to Desire.
I likened the emergence of Light to a manifestation of two brothers, knowing quite well that there are not two brothers, nor even one. But I saw that one is the embodiment of the desire to be, to express, and one (not saying "the other") is to be, to be. The latter is nonluminous, and the former, prevailing, is luminous. This prevailing luminous source can be visualized as becoming a wild dance of flame that settles and spends itself into material. Material, I believe, is spent Light. Silence and Light. Silence is not very, very quiet. It is something that you may say is lightless, darkness. These are all invented words. Darkness—there is no such word. But why not? Lightless; darkness. Desire to be, to express. Some can say this is the ambient soul—if you go back beyond and think of something in
which Light and Silence were together, and may be still together, and separate only for the convenience of argument [14].

Place: between tangibility and intangibility

It is Christian Norberg-Schulz who makes the important attempt in Genius-Loci Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture, after making considerable conceptual debt to Martin Heidegger, to rephrase the task of architecture in the light of existential concept of place. Norberg-Schulz begins with the idea that one of the basic needs of man is to experience his life-situation as meaningful. "To dwell implies establishment of a meaningful relationship between man and a given environment" [15]. Dwelling, thus, is a basic physical and psychic need of man; it is synonymous with providing an 'existential foothold'. It is the purpose of architecture to "concretize" that, while it is the general purpose of the work of art to "keep" and transmit meanings.

Norberg-Schulz also maintains the Heideggerian notion that 'spaces receive their being from locations and not from "space"', and advances the idea of a "genius loci", the spirit that pervades a place according to ancient Roman concept, the "opposite" according to the ancients which man has to come to terms with to be able to dwell. When man dwells in this sense, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to certain environmental character which determines his dwelling. "The existential purpose of a building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment" [16]. Could one say then, employing a line from existentialist thinking, that essence precedes existence?

Is Norberg-Schulz placing too great a significance on the environmental-geographical dimension? Is the environment, and the spirit therein, the fundamental determinant of man's existential order, and
10. "Locus Solus": Rome (above) and Istanbul (below).
ultimately, the architectural task? While “genius loci”, as spirit or nature of place, is an important concept in understanding existential structure in primordial or ‘virgin’ conditions, Norberg-Schulz is not elaborate on the manner of its formation, nor is he particularly emphatic on subsequent conditions -the creation of complex human condition, the society and the city, which is almost always very distanced from its primordial origin or the natural realm. Although he claims that “history becomes meaningful if it represents new concretizations of the existential dimension”[17], change in mentalite, the effect of new inter and extra cultural forces, and the impact of trans-cultural monolithic world-view on the existential frame is not scrutinized and adapted to his proposition convincingly. The most important question we can raise finally is: Is the ‘spirit of the place’ really so distinct from the human consciousness of a place, when Norberg-Schulz attributes such an ‘entity-ness’ to the environment seemingly autonomous from and counterpoised against human consciousness? Or, is the ‘spirit’ really a human construction, an object of man’s conscious and unselfconscious reverie?

On the other hand, Aldo Rossi transposes the notion of place in a completely human milieu -the city. Rossi sees place as locus, “a relationship between a certain specific location and the building that are in it”[18]. The locus is constituted by the conjunction of context and primary elements/monuments. While he argues that the locus is a human creation determined by the imposition of human artifacts on the terrain, he is never categorical about whether locus shapes primary elements, or vice versa, although the primary elements may define the locus of the city. Rossi is however clear, and this is where he lays his emphasis on, about the autonomy of primary elements from context; moreover, it is the primary elements which determine context, and not vice versa. He also attributes the characteristics of permanence, of formal persistence over time, to the two primary elements of the city: housing and monuments. Housing, unlike the constantly changing individual houses, attains permanence by the maintenance of its characteristic area and morphology. The monuments persist, unlike housing as a characteristic area, as individual

17. Norberg-Schulz.

artifacts. "They are also distinguished from housing by their nature as a place of symbolic function, and thus a function related to time, as opposed to a place of conventional function, which is only related to use" [19].

While Rossi makes this classification to further the research on 'the relationship to architecture to the constituting of the city' [20], he sees these also as constituents in understanding the concept of locus. To quote a section from Peter Eisenman's introduction to the English edition of Rossi's The Architecture of the City:

The locus is a component of an individual artifact which, like permanence, is determined not just by space but also by time, by topography and form, and, most importantly, by its having been the site of a succession of both ancient and more recent events. For Rossi, the city is a theater of human events. This theater is no longer just a representation; it is reality. It absorbs events and feelings, and every new event contains within it a memory of the past and a potential memory of the future. Thus, while the locus is a site which can accommodate a series of events, it also in itself constitutes an event. In this sense, it is a unique or characteristic place, a "locus solus". Its singularity is recognizable in signs that come to mark the occurrence of these events. Included in this idea of the locus solus, then, is the specific but also universal relationship between a certain site and the buildings that are on it. Buildings may be signs of events that have occurred on a specific site; and this threefold relationship of site, event, and sign becomes a characteristic of urban artifacts. Hence, the locus may be said to be the place on which architecture or form can be imprinted. Architecture gives form to the singularity of place, and it is in this specific form that the locus persists through many changes, particularly transformation of functions [21].

Contained within this is the triangular confluence introduced before: geographical-spatial location, the component of time, and human events. But what is most important, as Eisenman points out, is the locus being determined 'by its having been the site of a succession of
both ancient and more recent events’. Rossi introduces the historical sense in our consciousness again, but at the same time, suggesting a further dimension or limitation to it. To use Eisenman’s analysis again: “History exists so long as an object is in use; that is, so long as a form relates to its original function. However, when form and function are severed, and only form remains vital, history shifts into the realm of memory. When history ends, memory begins” [22]. The singular form not only signifies its own individuality, but at the same time, it is also a sign, a record of events that are part of a collective - that is, urban- memory. History comes to be known through the relationship between a collective memory of events, a singularity of place (locus solus), and the sign of the place as expressed in form.

The new time which Rossi would like for architecture to comprehend is not merely of history, but mainly of memory; as such, time moves into the psychological domain. Now, “the individual artifact for the first time is understood within the psychological construct of collective memory” [23].
Consciousness: Continuity and Rupture

Is consciousness an inviolate, static entity which defies transformation and re-conceptualization? Or, is consciousness like a river, always flowing in one direction, forward? And, like a river, it dilates and it constricts, it constantly changes shape and speed, and, encounters new bends and twists, and, yet, it retains a continuity; in its ever transforming form it never forgets how it originated.

The nature of consciousness, in a cultural entity, can vary from an organic condition, as in the Dogon, to a highly complex and varying plurality, as in a world of cultures like India. In confronting the latter, history becomes the string of points where inflection and deviation occur. History can also become, instead of only validating disjuncted periodisation, a stream of continuity.

In societies which have undergone Islamisation, particularly as Bengal, the question of consciousness raises a unique set of problems deeply related to the formation of place: Does the coming of Islam mean that all pre and extra-Islamic notions have been jettisoned? Does the beginning of Islam within a culture, specifically located in time as it is, becomes a mental state without precedence and pre-history? On the other hand, does the timelessness and divine aspect of Islam, with which all aspects of temporal life is reviewed today, warrant no room for reconceptualization?

The rise of Islam in the Arabic heartland did not mean it had completely rejected the existing or the past; in fact, Islam not only incorporated many events and rituals but drew upon them to build its schema. In ‘Islamisation’ of various societies, as diverse as Indonesia or Morocco, it did not, or could not, occur with a complete overturn of the existing cultural consciousness. Historically, Islam, as a religion, was elaborated within the fundamental parameters and ‘deep structure’ of a society [1]. For that reason, we find many rituals and beliefs now, sanctioned within an “Islamic” frame in a particular region, become anathema in another.

1. Mohammad Arkoun in the deliberations of Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) seminar
The present dominant perspective of Islam, as a ‘mono-cultural’, irreconcilable ideological frame, is the result of successive deviations from its historical role. Within this ideological encrustation, we are ready to jettison all pre-Islamic notions, however they may be embedded in our present consciousness, and start history, in whatever region we may be, from the time Islam rose to prominence. Mohammed Arkoun, in analyzing the phenomenon of transformation of Islam from a religious role to an ideological weapon, identifies what he calls ‘a key concept in Islamic history: the concept of rupture’. Rupture, in this sense, means deviation from a historically originated condition. Arkoun identifies three such moments of rupture: first, when, as early as the 7th century during the political triumph of Mu’awiya, political power, by reversing the original role, “began to use the Authority of God just as an idealised image to be manipulated by the ‘ulama to legitimise the so-called Caliphate” [2]; second, after the 9th century, when what came to be known as “orthodoxy” forced the abandonment of earlier pluralist thinking in Islam; and, third, after the 19th century, when, with the introduction of European modernity and secularisation, “orthodoxy” pushed itself towards a more irreconciliable and dogmatic position.

What has been attempted to point out here is that historically Islam, as a religion, did not, in its victorious encounters, obliterate existing consciousnesses, even if it did overwhelm them. Moreover, before the 11th century, there was a thriving scholarly and intellectual tradition named adab, distinct from the religious tradition, which dealt with mundane, terrestrial affairs such as history, the wisdom of nations, language, poetry, the ever new affairs of men, etc. The subsequent rise and dominance of “orthodoxy” has ostracized this tradition, plunging Muslim societies into a 'cloistered' consciousness which is most often unable to engage in a discourse with new human developments. In his discussion, Arkoun identifies the rise of secularisation as a major shift in western conception from 'one mental structure and space to another' which influenced not only European but also all other societies. In Muslim societies, the lack of discourse

in engaging dialectically such notions, which earlier had formed part of the tradition of thoughts, has produced the schismatic condition that we face today.

The important thing to consider here is that no *human* thoughts lie fractured from an association with the past, nor can such thoughts remain in a hermetically sealed cocoon. Both rupture and a 'freezing' of consciousness are anachronism; both tend to traumatize a particular collective consciousness. Even secularisation, as Arkoun comments, constitutes a substantial "reinvestment" of the earlier gathered perceptions. "Reinvestment" generally occurs when phenomena of upheaval occur within regions of homologous cultural and mental structure.

A rupture, engendered by *extra-cultural* forces, tend to be more traumatic. In order to enact and perpetuate a dominance, these forces are generally more aggressive, rather than conciliatory, towards the existing structure. The hegemony of the extra-cultural forces for a long period, brought about by political and economic engineering, as happened during the English presence in India, can usurp the existing consciousnesses and gradually relegate it to a corner. In this case, the native elites also participate in aggravating the 'cultural amnesia'. What is retained of the 'usurped' consciousness is probably mostly in folk-cultures, where the urban-based elites infiltrate least, or even in the sub-conscious pattern of elite culture itself. Thus, the rupture brings about a pluralism in society as opposed to the homogeneous organic nature of its preceding stage. 'Organic consciousness' is detonated, and its vestiges are retained in fragments. It is probably from this point it becomes frustrating to locate a collective cultural value.

Cultural 'subversion' is another way of making a consciousness ambiguous. It is the planned operation to degenerate an existing consciousness in order to transplant a concocted one so that a politically-based ideology is perpetuated. The history of Pakistan, in context with the events of then East Pakistan, is an exemplary case.
Identifying "Bengaliness" as inimical to the conception and preservation of Pakistan (or, in reality, a threat to the hegemony of the West Pakistan-based government), conscious schemes, in the name of Islam, attempted to undermine the persistent modes and norms in Bengali life: 'attack' on and distortion of Bengali language, engineering of divorce between Hindu-dominated Calcutta culture and Muslim-dominated Dhaka culture, intellectual exile of Rabindranath Tagore, and the distortive and selective use of Kazi Nazrul Islam, as two particular instances in literature; and, consistent diatribe on Bengali rites and rituals which did not appear to have any affiliation with known "Islamic" source. The subversion could occur efficiently, until the War of Liberation in 1971, because a portion of Bengali intellectuals and elites, completely overwhelmed by the myth of "Islamic" Pakistan, and by completely jettisoning the "pre-Islamic" sense of history, participated more in damaging, rather than dialectically elaborating within Islam, the already fledgling and confused Bengali identity.

If we can finally focus on the theme of this discussion, it is the notion of change and continuity together which forms a perpetual human condition. Even collective consciousness is not a static thing; it is ever always susceptible to change, and actually does change, either generated intra-culturally or extra-culturally, either as an evolution or violently. Although, change and continuity continue together, the latter becomes a matter of basic concern for a particular culture when a rupture overwhelms fundamental continuity. Also, it becomes a negation when a changing reality is resisted by dogmatic continuity.

But does change mean that anything goes? The final issue is how we can harness change - -put the wheel of change within the track of continuity-- with what is known, with those key moments in the cultural terrain which, on one hand, legitimizes the change, and, on the other, maintains continuity. Among the alternatives of dealing with precedence in a moment of rupture, it is reinvestment of the 'substantial' past, not total cancellation, which ensures dialectics, instead of disjuncted historical moments.
Calvin and Hobbes

...then there was Calvin!

Calvin, the mighty god, creates the universe with pure will!

From utter nothingness comes swirling form! Life begins where once was void!

But Calvin is no kind and loving god. He's one of the old gods! He demands sacrifice!

Yes, Calvin is a god of the Underworld! And the puny inhabitants of Earth despair at his power!

The great Calvin ignores their pleas for mercy and the doomed worker is agony!

Have you seen how absorbed Calvin is with those tinkertoys? He's creating whole worlds over there!

I'll bet he comes up to be an architect.
Architecture in an Amnesiac State

“But you see, if there were no God, everything would be possible.” [1]

The character in Dostoyosvsky’s novel echoes a fear, not an achievement, of modern man. It is also not really losing the sight of Divinity but a fear of loss of a more permanent authority which will sanction the enterprises of man; an authority which will remain unscathed despite the continuous fluctuations of the ‘world-order’. Man, while remaining eternally suspended between the urges of permanence and change, really is in constant ‘terror’ of being lost.

The ‘terror of being lost’[2] comes as a natural consequence to a mobile organism as man, who tries to eradicate it in his continuous bid to orient himself to his surroundings. A ‘good environmental image’, as Kevin Lynch suggests, does more than orient, it “gives its possessor an important sense of security”[3]. It is the explicit recognition and awareness of a place, both physically and psychically, which provides not only identity but, most importantly, a “maternal security”. In Bengal, the notion of the place as a maternal archetype [‘maa’], although derived from ancient religious sentiments, is still used, often more spiritually than merely metaphorically.

The concern for the loss of psychic security and identity, although most acute in our contemporary times, plagued man since his origin. It was amnesia of the preceeding world, and the need to “dwell”, which must have ‘terrorized’ Adam and Eve after they were banished from paradise and “thrown into the world, not set into a place fashioned beforehand by an all-seeing, all-powerful and benevolent Deity” [4]. But what afflicts the ‘orientation’ of contemporary man? And, what has generated this loss?

If there is a single phenomenon which has charged the world, in recent times, in an unprecedented manner, in almost every culture, every nation, and every home, it is the euphoria of change, an obesiant faith in the future at the expense of the old, authoritative order. The

1. In Fyodor Dostoyosvsky’s The Brothers Karamazov.

2. Kevin Lynch, What Time is This Place.


4. Abraham Kaplan in New World of Philosophy in explaining "existentialism".

I bow, I bow to my beautiful motherland Bengal!
To your riverbanks, to your winds that cool and console;
Your plains, whose dust the sky bends down to kiss:
Your shrouded villages, that are nests of shade and peace;
Your leafy mango-woods, where the herd-boys play;
Your deep-ponds, loving and cool as the midnight sky;
Your sweet-hearted women returning home with water;
I tremble in my soul and weep when I call you Mother.
-Rabindranath Tagore, A Half Acre of Land.
authority was often uncritically lumped together to include political institutions, economic order, societal structure, and architectural-urban matrix. The rally for change which in turn ushered an equally unprecedented mood of global affiliation soon actually degenerated into global homogenization. The preponderance of economic and utilitarian imperatives, as the common denominators which characterize global reality today, has ruptured the existential world. The physical, disjointed from the psychic, has been over-amplified so as to seem as the core of ‘real’ experience. The overwhelming presence of global constructs has resulted in the diminishing, if not the depletion, of place-consciousness. Architecture, respondent to the dominant societal mode, has veered away from its fundamental task.

In the European milieu, the suspicion of authority prompted the artists to take up a self-assigned messianic role, as Paul Klee would declare: “It is the artist’s purpose to create Cosmos(order) out of Chaos”. The subversion of authority offered the creative group of people what they believed to be ‘liberation’ from the burdens of conventions. Thus, a detachment from the past modes, a consciously projected amnesia, a constructed tabula rasa, became the point of departure for most creative endeavours. But, as Clifford Geertz observes:

Susanne Langer [in her book, Philosophy in a New Key] remarks that certain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force. They resolve so many fundamental problems at once that they seem also to promise that they will resolve all fundamental problems, clarify all obscure issues. Everyone snaps them up as the open sesame of some new positive science, the conceptual center-point around which a comprehensive system of analysis can be built. The sudden vogue of such a grande id’ee, crowding out almost everything else for a while, is due, she says, “to the fact that all sensitive and active minds turn at one to exploiting it. We try it in every connection, for every purpose, experiment with possible stretches of its strict meaning, with generalizations and derivatives.”

After we have become familiar with the new idea, however, after it has become part of our general theoretical concepts, our expec-
tations are brought more into balance with its actual uses, and its excessive popularity is ended. A few zealots persist in the old key-to-the-universe view of it; but less driven thinkers settle down after a while to the problems the idea has really generated... The second law of thermodynamics, or the principle of natural selection, or the notion of unconscious motivation, or the organization of the means of production does not explain everything, not even everything human, but it still explains something; and our attention shifts to isolating just what that something is, to disentangling ourselves from a lot of pseudoscience to which, in the first flush of its celebrity, it has also given rise [5].

After the spark of the 'key-to-the-universe' has evaporated, a new and real problem is encountered: the dilemma of arbitrariness. And, it is this dilemma, or the need to overcome it, or to speak conversely, to attain a deeper reason-for-being, which stalks the struggle of architects today. Karsten Harries sums it up tersely: "The less nature and culture determine what we have to be, the greater our freedom; the greater also the dread of arbitrariness" [6]. It is also the core of philosophical speculation on contemporary man, as existentialist thinkers would raise: 'if everything is possible then how to decide which among the infinite possibilities is to be actualized by human choice. On what basis can such a choice be made' [7]. William Hubbard, in *Complicity and Conviction: Steps Towards an Architecture of Conventions*, talks about the dilemma of 'otherwiseness': "If there is one characteristic that links the diverse art movements of the modernist period, it is perhaps a hyperawareness of the fact that one's personal sensibility could have been otherwise. A modernist artist is so deeply aware of this possibility of otherwise-ness that he feels a deep unease about simply accepting his own sensibility. He feels a need for some reason that will convince him that he ought to feel one way and not another" [8].

Meanwhile, cultures like Bengal suffer a dual trauma: a significant displacement of place-consciousness by a global common denominator, predominantly by Eurocentric cultural-economic structure, and,
less significantly, but more surreptiously, by an Arabic one within the guise of Islam; and, by the uncritical adoption, as a consequence of the first condition, of the architectural modes polemicizing ‘freedom’. Both eventually plunge the architectural culture, as it actually did, into a fit of arbitrariness.

When Kahn, in a more philosophical and provocative vein, posed what a building ‘wants to be’, he basically raised the question of the fundamental role of architecture, and what ‘we find natural and hence inevitable’. How can architecture, in the present cultural condition of Bangladesh, find a more valid reason-for-being? Must architecture remain in the periphery instead of regaining its fundamental role of concretizing existential meaning? The return to ‘what is essential’, to find a more meaningful authentication, architecture has to seek an ‘authority’ which cuts through the temporality of current needs, of economic arguments and of sociological statistics. The mission becomes dubious in a condition of cultural amnesia but architecture has to probe, prod and redefine the domain of the collective psyche from which it is generated and in which it is inserted.
'Architecture as Archaeology'
'Architecture as Archaeology'

Nothing old is ever reborn. But it never completely disappears either. And anything that has ever been always reemerges in a new form.

-Alvaar Aalto [1]

What will be has always been.

-Louis Kahn

The need to deal with the literal notion of 'architecture as archaeology' was prompted by the following factors:

(1) Place, being constituted of time, terrain and human activities, is an intricately connected "repository" of both human circumstances and artifacts. Artifacts dwell in the physical landscape, while human circumstances reside in both the collective and individual consciousness and the 'unconscious' --what we could call the 'landscape of the mind' [2]. Needless to say, consciousness and the unconscious need time as a medium for its perpetuation. A 'traumatic' rupture in the continuity of consciousness affects the intensity of Place --it is either transformed, deformed or made confusing.

(2) If the above argument can be accepted, it is possible that an extreme case of deformation of or confusion in place may actually engender a kind of cultural amnesia where disjunctions of consciousness is more vivid than a linkage. Moreover, the rupture of the recent with the distant may make the latter incomprehensible, and thus completely render a portion of the "repository" invisible and inaccessible. The present condition of Bangladesh is bogged in such an amnesia.

(3) If we are also to accept Jung's idea of the 'collective unconscious' where a great portion of the "repository" lies, not obliterated, but dormant, then a retrieval of segments of the veiled circumstances is

1. Aalto, Painters and Masons (1921).

2. This was inspired by the notion of 'landscape of ideas' used by Malcolm Quantrill in Environmental Memory.
possible through archetypal awakening. Conversely, we can suggest that, in an amnesiac state, where the cognition of place is deformed by the presence of extraneous circumstances, it becomes a fundamental task to excavate the whole range of human materials (existing artifacts, myths, lores, rituals, etc.) to retrieve the archetypal sense through contemporary means. This is the essence of the idea of “architecture as archaeology”.

(4) An architectural project is also a human project. Also, an architectural project, as an artifact and human circumstance, not only adds to the “repository” of place but also springs from it. An architectural project created by a particular human circumstance, by its very creation, is new, and yet it has an inherent deposit of the past. This is probably what Lethaby implied by saying that “behind every style of architecture there is an earlier style, in which the germ of every form is found” [3].

While the explicit intentions for an architectural creation can be diverse and many, what seems to be of relevance for the discussion here is the archaeological intention. One thinks of the etchings of Piranesi as embodying that spirit in their imaginative evocation of a lost world from fragmentary evidences. On the other hand, the architecture of Fatehpur-Sikri and the Sultanate mosques of Bengal offer a different ‘archaeological’ value. Poised at a threshold moment in history, when a new consciousness (Islam) overwhelmed an old one, these works, by their authentic response to place, give a vivid and inspirational evidence of a “reinvestment”. Both Fatehpur-Sikri and the early Bengali mosques are discussed at the end of this part.

The Component of Time

Time, as a component of the formation of place, is also crucial in the speculation on things and events that have already happened and are in the past. Archaeological retrieval also engages the factor of time.
George Orwell’s parable in 1984 “Those who control the past control the future, and those who control the present control the past” reveals man’s constant struggle with what is in the past so as to make his present and eventually his future meaningful. Orwell also alludes to the eerie fact that the past is hardly an independent entity which can be objectively known, but can only be discerned through the socio-political-ideological lens of a particular time. As the meaning of existence and the legitimacy of the present, as understood in a particular societal group, are revealed in the totality of its previous modes, it is only a natural consequence that the knowledge of the past is power. The past, as that continuous repository of events and trail of physical evidences in a domain of contiguous meaning (culture), form the main structural component of the consciousness of a place. To say it differently, it is the history of type and the summation of events which form the notion of Place.

An attitude towards the past, and relationship to it, is often shaped by a cultural perception of time. In the dominant Western conception today time is a strictly linear progression, or to paraphrase Eugene Minkowski, ‘the essence of life is not “a feeling of being, of existence”, but a feeling of participation in a flowing onward, necessarily expressed in terms of time, and secondarily expressed in terms of space’ [4]. It does follow then, in the Western sense, the past is always ‘a foreign country’, and to get there one needs to make a conscious effort.

The idea of chakra, cycle, in ordering the cosmology, form the core of ancient Hindu consciousness. Heinrich Zimmer gives an explanation of this consciousness:

The history of the universe in its periodic passage from evolution to dissolution is conceived as a biological process of gradual and relentless deterioration, disintegration and decay. Only after everything has run its course into total annihilation and been then re-incubated in the boundlessness of the timeless cosmic night, does the universe reappear in perfection, pristine, beautiful and

reborn. Whereupon, immediately, with the first tick of time, the irreversible process begins anew. The perfection of life, the human capacity to apprehend and assimilate ideals of highest saintliness and selfless purity—in other words the divine quality or energy of Dharma—is in a continuous decline. And during the process the strangest histories take place; yet nothing that has not, in the endless wheelings of the eons, happened many, many times before [5].

Zimmer also points out that the idea of time as recurrent was central to the Greek conception, similar to the ancient Hindu idea. The past was indistinguishable from the present as late as the 18th century in Europe. According to Zimmer, both Greek and Hindu conceptions adhered to the tradition of ‘a perennial philosophy, an ageless wisdom revealed and re-revealed, restored, lost, and again restored through the cycles of the ages’ [6]. It is not surprising then not to find in the history of India, at least until recently, such idealistic motivation as the Renaissance in Europe of making a great surge forward by looking backward. Although the dominance of linear time conception has convoluted the idea of chakra, it survives in many secular forms. In Bengal, for example, the metaphor deriving from the alternate benevolent and violent river occupy many figures of expression.

The notion of the past in the much abused sense of nostalgia, ‘a pathological attachment’ to the bygone, or, conversely, a mistrust in the foreboding future, is certainly not the one invoked here. The point raised here is whether the past is an ‘autonomous entity’, a ‘foreign country’, permanently detached from us, for which we have to make a formidable intellectual struggle to get closer to. This is the point George Kubler makes: “All past events are more remote from our senses than the stars of the remotest galaxies whose light at least reaches the telescope” [7]. On the other hand, the past may not be a debris of dead memorabilia: ruins, documents, relics, and memories. In fact, it may be a continuous stream up to the present, often clear, and often subdued, but which in its totality forms the core of our being. As Bergson says in Creative Evolution: “Centuries of tradition underlies
every instant of perception and creation, pervading not only artifacts and culture but the very cells of our bodies.”

The Historical Sense

No other era seemed to be more concerned with conceptualizing the past than ours. Obviously, this concern is paradoxically generated by the equal euphoria of our times with merely the ‘future’. In societies, where the past lives as comfortably as ‘a woman drapes her sari’ [8], such euphoria is going to generate the greatest antagonism of perception and values, as it already has. Even in western societies, where a dominant section would define their perspective within these temporal terms, people have unselfconsciously or surreptitiously beckoned the past. Isn’t a ‘forced’ dwelling in only the present, with a complete exclusion of the totality of the past events, engenders the arbitrariness in art, which we have introduced earlier, and which makes every artistic project an argument for a constantly changing authority?

T.S. Eliot, reflecting on the apparent contradiction of tradition and individual talent, of the past and the present in a work in the context of European literature, said: “Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who could continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous...


...the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people, and even the awareness of his own being... until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past.

-Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude.
13. Imagination and memory: "The House with the Peristyle" from "Imaginary View of Venice"; etching by Canaletto (1740).
order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity"[9].

It is this *historical sense*, permeating a work, which gives it legitimacy because historical sense implies a spiritual communion with a place, a feeling in the "bones" of the whole "repository" of artifacts and consciousness which have formed the place. It is also a consciousness of the contemporary time which adds another layer to that "repository". In this sense, all 'authentic' art is "dimly archaeological"; it has inscribed within it the whole history of art of that place, from the primordial beginning down to contemporary inception. Of course, there have been certain moments which have very consciously attempted to invoke a particularly acute historical moment. The Renaissance in Europe is a classic example of surging forward by actually looking backward to the Ancient World [10]; the Neo-Classic movement of the 19th century, however, exasperated by its own time, sought a psychological refuge in the symbols of Ancient Rome. Some of the "modernists", despite their overt allegience towards the present, derived their fundamental strategy from a reading of the previous worlds: Le Corbusier's 'perceptual discovery' of Parthenon and Istanbul, for example, served as germinating models for his entire *ouvre*.

**History and Memory**

And perhaps architecture has always wanted to be a theater of memory...

-Umberto Eco [11]

The *historical sense*, as Eliot outlines it, perpetuates itself through two means: history and memory. The two means are not always mutually exclusive; their edge is most often indistinguishable, and yet


they do serve certain categories of forging links with the past.

The past certainly does not operate in vacuum; to look at it most simply, it exists either as material remains or in the human memory. History has been conventionally accorded the status of authority which establishes certain relationships with the past. History, for the interpretation of the past, completely relies on material evidence and the particular ideological perspective of the time (according to the Orwellian parable). The evidences are in living artifices, relics, ruins, documents, records or even in certain memorial tradition. The basic idea of the notion of history is that it can be empirically tested; it implies knowledge which is verifiable and objective. This is particularly corroborated by the ‘presence of history’ not only as a human attribute but as a characteristic in the ‘non-human’ world too: stars and galaxies are born out of primordial matter, and they mature and age and leave traces of their life as ‘historical material’; similarly, the rings in the trunk of a tree speaks of its history.

Memory, on the other hand, does not seem to have any tangibility; it appears to be a ‘figment of the mind’, and therefore, scientifically unreliable. Yet, the realm of memory, formed by myths, legends, lores, rituals, reveries, etc., constitute a part of the oral tradition which may retain the essence of previous things more authentically because of its ‘unselfconsciousness’. In the interpretation of the past, while history is intentional, always focussed by the ideological lens of the time, memory, because of its reliance on the unselfconsciousness of the mind may be less pretentious. Lowenthal in *The Past is a Foreign Country* remarks: “Physical remains have their limitations as informants, to be sure: they are themselves mute, requiring interpretation; their continual but differential erosion and demolition skews the record; and their substantial survival conjures up a past more static than could have been the case.” But, he adds that “however depleted by time and use, relics remain essential bridges between then and now. They confirm or deny what we think of it, symbolize or memorialize communal links over time and provide archaeological metaphors that illumine the process of history and memory” [12].

14. The memory of the original hut, after Laugier.
In fact, a closer scrutiny will only eliminate the territorial boundary of history and memory. Pannikar, writing about perceptions of India’s past, remarks that there are “no criteria for differentiating between myth and history.... What the Westerners consider as history in the West, he would regard as myth in India; .... what he calls history in his own world is experienced by Indians as myth” [13]. Lowenthal further identifies the ambiguous distinction between history and memory by pointing out that “‘memory’ includes second-hand accounts of the past—that is history; ‘history’ relies on eyewitness and other recollections—that is memory” [14].

And, yet, it is significantly memory, formed as a latent phenomenon in the conscious and unconscious realm of our mind, which forms the core of our collective identity, and to which we fall back upon, beyond societal ideology, economic production, historically conditioned nationalist aspiration, for the eventual meaning of our collective and individual existence. Ritwik Ghatak’s experience, which inaugurated this “text”, echoes this idea.

Thus, both memory and history charge an artistic intention. Laugier’s assertion that all classical buildings, and hence all later buildings too, derive their cue from the primordial hut implies the role of memory. Architecture has been fundamentally that: a theater of memory. Then, if the significant essence of our being dwells in memory, and, if architecture, as its fundamental role, needs to make it palpable, how can it latch on this ‘meta-physical’ realm?

The Dilemma of Representation

For an artist, if attaining the historical sense, or feeling in the “bones”, as Eliot would say, seems ambiguous, the means of representation seems more so. In fact, it is the nature of representation which not only reflects the historical sense of the artist but also effectively affects the evocation of place.
Representation is the dominant image that we perceive visually and spatially, and which, in turn, generates associative images. Replication, as in the in toto maintenance of traditional dwellings, is the fundamental form of representation which indicates maintenance of past modes in a socially-ideologically organic and 'stable' system. Preservation, of certain landmarks from a previous epoch, on the other hand, indicates a conscious resistance of a transforming society to overwhelming change and a desire for 'frozen stability'.

But stability and persistence are hardly the only realities of life. If these form one side of the coin of human reality, change and transformation form the other. To Kevin Lynch: "Change and recurrence are the sense of being alive --things gone by, death to come, and present awareness. The world around us, so much of it our own creation, shifts continually and often bewilders us. We reach out to that world to preserve or to change it and so to make visible our desire" [15].

Changing ideology --intellectual, societal, political-- coupled with the methods of material distribution influence ways of looking at our cognitive world, and decides new societal and communal-individual relationship. This is also manifested spatially and physically. Architecture, to engage both sides of the coin, which it must do so within the understood frame of the current discipline, cannot be a mere replication or preservation of physical form. Art, and architecture, immersed in the dynamics of acceptance and resistance, has to adopt a critical role too.

Representation, within this light, assumes a different significance. If the past architectural syntax is not replicable today, as it had its raison d'etre intrinsically rooted in a particular time and context, contemporary expression becomes first an enquiry into what aspect of the past enjoys comprehension today, or what aspect of a present aspiration seems to have a correspondence with a past mode; and, then a translation of this into physical facts employing not bricks and

15. Kevin Lynch, What Time is This Place, p.1.
mortars as raw materials, but the tools of signs and symbols, of associative images and sensations.

The following chapters look at two situations in times different than ours: Akbar's Fatehpur Sikri and Bengal in the 15th century. Both situations constitute, by the confluence of two differing consciousnesses -- one existing, another new; one continuous, another ushering change -- a paradigmatic threshold point. The works are discussed particularly within the context of memory, transforming consciousness and new representation.
Fatehpur Sikri: Between Memory and Invention

Now that the light of truth has taken possession of our soul, it has become clear that in this distressful place of contrarities (the world), where darkness of comprehension and conceit are heaped up, fold upon fold, a single step cannot be taken without the torch of proof, and that the creed is profitable which is adopted with the approval of wisdom...

Obedience is not the placing of your forehead in the dust.
Produce truth, for sincerity is not situated in the forehead.
-Akbar, as quoted by Abu’l-Fazl Allami in Akbarnama, 1596-1602.

The Indian sub-continent has never been so polarized as it has been since the coming of Islam. The parallel and powerful existence of both Islam and Hinduism has instigated such divergent ideologies that a dialogue between them at any plane seems improbable, although a large mass of people, on both sides, share the same archetypal consciousness bound in the myths and poesis of the land. While the confluence of these two streams has mostly remained confrontational, thus always furthering the ideological rather than the religious positions, there have been moments where faith and place coalesced. Akbar’s enterprise at Fatehpur Sikri, even if short-lived and ultimately failed in developing, promised that.

Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar’s capital for fourteen years, an enigma in many ways, eludes the rationalization historians have so far attempted on it. Is Fatehpur Sikri a city, or a royal citadel? Is it really the product of Akbar the political genius or a whimsical potentate? More importantly, is its architectural-urban manifestation ‘Islamic’, Mughal or Rajput? [1] While such questions require enquiry, Fatehpur Sikri continues to remain as an emblem of invention, not only in its remarkable architecture, but also in the experiments in government, theology, the arts, and even religion.

While Akbar, in his political and military achievements, form the pinnacle of Mughal dynasty, his architecture, especially at Fatehpur,
Fatehpur-Sikri: general view of the royal complex and the Jami masjid.
attains specificity because of the marked departure from preceding and later Mughal syntax. While it is easier to form a class of the building ensembles, from the time of Babur to Aurangzeb, with their basic principles gathered from Central Asia, Fatehpur Sikri achieves a greater degree of complexity, in terms of historical-stylistic periodisation, and stands sufficiently apart from the emblematic Mughal modes. While architecture by the Muslim rulers at Delhi before Akbar appropriated and adopted 'Indian' devices, it was Akbar's work which comes closest to forming a synthesis of principles and perception originating in Persia and North India. Akbar's extensive knowledge of cities from Kabul (in Afghanistan) to Chittorgarh (in Northern India) formed the material basis, and the ideological motivation which Fatehpur Sikri symbolizes formed the spiritual basis for his enterprise.

What distinguishes the architecture of Fatehpur Sikri? Firstly, it was the geo-psychic sense of place which the Akbari project responded to. Before becoming a royal settlement Fathepur was already a place, the abode of a saint whom Akbar venerated. The place was also in the memory of the Mughal dynasts since the time of Babur. It was the edge, being on the threshold of Mughal-dominated Delhi and the Rajput-dominated south, made more significant by the preexistence of a Rajput fort-building, which layered on Fathepur-Sikri the growing realities of India. Akbar's victorious campaigns in the south, of which Fathepur became the symbol, made this significance most explicit. In the formation of the settlement, Mughal sensibility was not merely imposed, but the various sensibilities of the place was invoked --topographical (in the composition and location of the royal settlement and its various parts), symbolic (Buland Darwaza, as a gate to the newly acquired territory), and architectonic pre-history (the Rajput as existing and in local memory).

The second distinguishing condition is the organization of the royal residence. It is possible to suggest that the Rajput building not only generated the formal and spatial matrix of the the 'invention' but also
16. Fatehpur-Sikri, plans.
formulated the singularity of the architectural elements. Brand and Lowry in their introduction to *Fatehpur-Sikri: A Source Book* raise this point but without any particular conclusion:

While it is difficult to identify precisely the cities that served as models for Fatehpur-Sikri, it is even harder to identify the sources for the architectural forms of its buildings. Almost all of them share a number of features with the pre-Mughal architecture of the Indian sub-continent, most notably the use of beams rather than arches to support roofs and doorways. Earlier Indian prototypes can also be found for many of the ornamental motifs that adorn the buildings. The majority of these motifs as well as the commonly used trabeate system of construction are usually said to derive directly from Hindu sources, such as the early-sixteenth century fort at Gwalior, about eighty miles south of Fatehpur-Sikri. [2]

A typological study of the architectural and urban space-form of Fatehpur-Sikri can result in a number of important conclusions. In the total ensemble, the mosque and the royal quarter form two distinct clusters. The Jami masjid, planimetrically, is derived, explicitly and rightfully, from the Persian type. The local reflections are mainly in the decorative features. The royal quarters offer more complexity. In its spatial order, in the nature of contained and open space, in the axiability and its shifting, in the fusing and overlapping of spaces, and, in some cases, in the deployment of form in space, while it can be said that it is a modification of the Mughal sense of geometry, it can also be said that it echoes the spatial character of certain temple and palace complexes. Each of the individual structures are also a complex overlapping of different syntax, motifs and architectural intentions. For example, the unique Diwan-i-Khas, believed to be Akbar’s audience chamber, has been inferred as the typological derivative of the royal tent in military camps. While the square, crystalline plan comes from a Central Asian heritage, the overhanging eaves, the sinuous brackets and the *chattri* are purely local elements. It is, however, the more unique composition of the central pedestal-column and bridges in the interior, where Akbar supposedly sat for audience, which could not have been more closer to the idea of axis
17. Typological sources: the imperial tent in Mughal military camps (left), Rajput pavilions (right).
18. Fatehpur-Sikri: the Diwan-i-Khas.
mundi or mandala; in the center of which is located, not bindu, the source of all energy, but the Emperor Akbar. The Diwan-i-Khas is the most quintessential structure of Akbar's enterprise; it is "a statement of staggering political and metaphysical impact. For Akbar has taken the myths of Hinduism and Buddhism and transformed them for his own purpose" [3].

A subtle interpenetration of Mughal and Rajput syntax was possible because of the two-way stylistic laxity which Akbar not only allowed but promoted, so that 'Persian' builders were able to deviate to a large degree from Mughal conventions, and the builders who were recruited from the Gujrat-Malwa region were able to operate beyond the dogmatic clutches of the ancient shastras. Whether the architecture of Fatehpur-Sikri marks a conscious assimilation of principles is a question of historical enquiry, but what can be said with emphasis is that the unprecedented synthetic ideology of Akbar and the cultural atmosphere he created in his capital became particularly effective in making the Mughal architectural monolith (conventions) less impositional and more responsive to the geo-physical and architectonic memory of the place in which it was created. On the other hand, the greater participation of non-Muslim nobility in Akbar's court and the emperor's personal interest in the "non-Muslim" crafts elevated the arts from provincial degradation. Moreover, they were exposed to, in a more assimilative manner, to the creative principles the ancestors of Akbar had brought to India. It is interesting, and not surprising, that with the death of Akbar, the synthetic process was carried on more by the Rajputs than by the imperial centre at Delhi.

Fatehpur-Sikri convincingly represents what a historian called a meeting point between "ancient theory and medieval practice, classical ideals and folk art, foreign inspiration and indigenous resources, and an imperial sovereign and the common people". It is possible to say that the 'Indian' milieu could not have produced an architectural ensemble like Fatehpur-Sikri in any other known age or regime, nor Akbar could have achieved this 'fusion' in any other region or with any set of builders. Although it was short-lived, it was a
paradigmatic partnership of Akbar's grandiloquent ideology and the cultural legacy of a region, or to verbalize within the idea of this investigation, it found an appropriateness because it could engage the memory, divergent as they were, of all its diverse dwellers. Or, to paraphrase Rossi, "it is history and it is invention" [4].

The Sultanate Mosques of Bengal: Ancient Consciousness, New Meaning

The coming of the Turks in Bengal, the ascendancy of Islam and the co-existence of Hinduism constitute an important threshold point not only for a historical understanding of the rise of Islam in Bengal, but also for an intellectual understanding of the confluence of religious beliefs and ancient consciousnesses. Except for Perween Hasan’s research on architecture, this is an issue which has not yet been looked at intensively. In the context of Bengal, this would, on one hand, provide the ‘absolute time’ which Oleg Grabar finds of concern in locating the formation of “Islamic” art, and, on the other hand, serve the issue of studying history as continuity which Michel Foucoul raises in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The architectural formulation of the Sultanate Turks particularly becomes a repository for understanding the dynamics of sources derived directly from the western domain of Islam, and those rooted in the then still extant Hindu domain. We can raise the old question again: does the shift in the mental state, which Islam obviously invoked, meant a complete obliteration of the Bengali *jagat* [1], or the perpetuation of the latter in another, even if less, significant form? And, if it does perpetuate, what does this signify?

The entrance of the Turks, while being alien to the Bengali milieu, were certainly very different from the later Mughal presence, indicating that mere Muslim ‘citizenry’ is not sufficient a point to explain away events, or to characterize historical periods as done conventionally. The earlier Turks were not as politically and ideologically charged as the Mughals were in maintaining a Delhi-based imperial power, and, unlike the Mughals again, they had *settled* in Bengal.

This latter condition can be considered as engendering a crucial displacement in the settlers’ psyche, thus drawing them more closer to a natural condition in which to mediate their inherited ideas with what they encountered as existing. Moreover, in Bengal, more than North India where the Muslims were predominantly people from

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1. *jagat*, the world.
20. Temple in Burma, left (15th-16th c.), in Bangladesh, right (18th c.).
Central Asia, converts to Islam formed the greatest bulk of the Muslim populace. It was, therefore, quite natural to see a greater coalescing of consciousness.

Between 1374 and 1375 Sikandar Shah I built the Adina Masjid at Pandua, explicitly and irrefutably patterned after certain ‘Arab’ models such as the Great Mosque at Damascus. It was a gigantic enterprise being the largest mosque in the sub-continent. It was formed by an enclosed courtyard with the nave and praying chambers on the western side; it measured 157m by 87m, the central barrel vaulted nave rose to a height of 13m. Although this was years after the first mosque stood on the Bengali landscape, and this was a type which the Arabs and Persians understood so well, this was never repeated again, even at a modest building scale. In fact, what became the Bengali mosque type, in the open landscape or in urbanized condition, was the small pavilion-like edifice sitting almost nondescriptly among the lush green foliage. Whether they are, individually, insufficiently grandiloquent for great historical schemes or whether they would have formed a footnote in Egyptian architectural culture, as Oleg Grabar observes [2], is much less important than the fact they became inserted, by the nature of their siting and architectural physiognomy, not in the natural landscape but also in the landscape of the mind.

Why many and small pavilion-like mosques were preferred for grand ensembles like Adina was because of the Bengali settlement pattern: the nature of the land-water terrain and the rarefied settlement made dispersed, multitudinal mosques more accessible. And, why ‘pavilion-like’ structures were preferred than the Middle-Eastern enclosed courtyard type can be argued from the reason of climate (hot-humid), function (ablution took place in the adjacent dighi, pond, rather than in a fountain as in the Ottoman-type courtyard), and persistence of previous images, or all of these.

Perween Hasan, in her seminal study of Sultanate mosques, identifies an iconographic transfer, though not entirely of meanings, from pre-
21. Sultanate mosque, plan types.
22. Atiya Masjid, Tangail (1609).
Islamic sources [2]. The Hindu temples, the ubiquitous, pavilion-like solitary figure in brick, in the Bengali landscape formed the architectural segment of the spiritual sensibility when the Turks over-ran Nadiya. The builders of the first mosques, probably fresh converts, but working closely with the early Muslim missionaries, grafted the constructional principles of dome, vaults and arches into the architectural schemata they understood experientially, and probably desired existentially. The Sultanate mosques, even in their elemental composition, adopted a number of preceding features, making them syntactically closer to the architecture of the place, and, at the same time, unique among the iconographic typology of mosques. The adoption of the Bangla roof, from a simple replication in brick to a more genuine version as the unique vault in Bagha Masjid, and the characteristic curved cornice, are gestures which would be understood deeply in the Bengali sensibility. Also, the exposed brickwork on the surface, the relief and terracotta decoration recall a tradition which reaches as far as the Buddhist monasteries built in the centuries between the 6th and the 8th.

While the early mosques clearly symbolized the dramatic turning point in the Bengali landscape with the ascendancy of the new religion Islam, and provided for the new rites and rituals, it also maintained, by evoking what it replaced, a remembrance of the past. In a complex way, it satisfied the new mental state that Islam obviously ushered, and also connected with the ancientness of the place.

What we can extract from the discussion on Fatehpur-Sikri and the early Bengali mosques are: (1) even at times of great societal change, when an unprecedented, new consciousness overtakes an existing one, there can also exist the germ of recurrence if certain conditions are conducive, (2) while such upheaval constitutes a rupture in any case, the germ of recurrence ensures that rupture does not occur at all.

levels, (3) within this dynamics, formed by change and continuity, the identity and structure of place is certainly redefined and elaborated, but definitely not precipitated, and (4) as architecture becomes the most visible intersection of this dynamics, it becomes necessary for us to understand how the germ of recurrence perpetuates.
4

Contemporary Strategies
23. Le Corbusier's observations of 'persistent forms', drawing in "Towards a New Architecture".

80
Archetype and Typology

To recapitulate some of the essential themes raised in the earlier parts: Place, as a physical and psychic ‘actuality’, is the essential collective reality which also forms the experiential and existential structure of dwelling. The role of architecture is to “concretize” and strengthen this structure.

Place has three components: artifacts and events (what is perpetuated), terrain (where it is perpetuated) and time (when it is perpetuated). The ‘concretizing’ role of architecture means it is also a sign which reveals this triangular confluence.

Place, in a narrower sense, is a continuous “repository” of artifacts and events. New artifacts, arising out of new events, is continuously added to that “repository”. In an organic and stable societal condition, the structure of place remains intact. But, in moments of rupture of consciousness of place, due to reasons generated internally or externally, the structure is made vulnerable to redefinition, modification or distortion (as the engendering conditions may be).

While, at points of threshold, change may seem inevitable, structural continuity of place becomes a more fundamental necessity. It is how the germ of recurrence manifests itself that affects the nature of continuity.

The present part, realising the inextricable link between place and architecture, introduces, at this junction, a discussion on the process of making, the realm of design, or that aspect of design strategy which engages the germ of recurrence, and thus the architecture-place notion. The discussion focusses on the archetypal and typological sensibilities, and makes a cursory survey of few architectural projects to see the ways in which type is absorbed and utilized in the design strategy.

Archetype

A penetration into Louis Kahn’s fragmented, and often abstruse,
The City from a simple settlement became the place of the assembled Institutions. Before the institution was natural agreement—the sense of commonality. The constant play of circumstances, from moment to moment unpredictable, distort inspiring beginnings of natural agreement. The measure of the greatness of a place to live must come from the character of its institutions sanctioned through how sensitive they are to renewed and desire for new agreement.
speculation on the making of architecture (his architecture is another thing) reveals the possibility of a correspondence with a number of notions that we have raised.

Kahn always realized that the beginning and ultimate destiny of architecture is in the “unmeasurable”; but this did not dissuade him in trying to understand the making of architecture on an “objective” or rational basis. To say that “architecture is an embodiment of the unmeasurable” only made the effort of tackling it on a rational territory a continuous and long search [1].

In saying “Order is...” Kahn acknowledges the existence of an order of things, of nature, of human conduct, which not only predates the designer’s intention but also any human action. Order, also synonymous with the idea of essence, whose origin is in the primordial collective condition of man, forms the existential world of man, making his life meaningful through such essential and definable activities as learning, living, working, meeting, questioning and expressing. Without this existential structure, or pattern, the activities of man would have been fragmentary and unrelated with events happening before and after, collectively incoherent and totally meaningless to each other.

Kahn also goes on to exclaim that essence resides in Silence; or we can say, essence is Silence. Silence is “unmeasurable”, and yet it has a “will-to-be”. We could reverse the idea and say that it is our human task or human need to uncover and reveal the essence. Kahn also says that “to express is the reason for living”, and expression is accomplished by means of Art (Architecture). Art is, therefore, the threshold where essence finds presence (being), or to use Kahn’s vocabulary, where Silence meets Light, and again, where “the will to be meets the means of expression” [2].

The “will-to-be/ to express” also becomes “the will to be/to make”. What is expressed or what is made is architecture and how it is made is the process we call design. Design is an aspect of the satisfaction


2. A number of articles and books deal with the ‘scattered’ sayings of Louis Kahn. What Will Be Has Always Been, ed. by Richard Saul Wurman, is the most comprehensive collection so far; John Lobell’s Between Silence and Light is a selective version. Norberg-Schulz’s article Kahn, Heidegger and the Language of Architecture makes an ‘interpretation’ of the salient features.
of the “existence-will”, of the translation of the inner order into being. What we could highlight from here, a point which Kahn always emphasized, is that order precedes design. This notion becomes particularly significant in circumventing the dilemma of the arbitrariness of form-making; the raison d'être of architecture are not merely in economic and socio-political conditions (Kahn would call these circumstances which affect design not ‘form’) but it is in ‘the spirit and will to exist in a certain way’. So, “it is not what you want, it is what you sense in the order of things which tells you what to design” [3].

Another key idea in Kahn’s schemata is the notion of “institution”. The institutions stem from the “beginning”, when man, as part of his collective condition, came to realize his “desires” or “inspirations”: to learn, to live, to work, to meet, to question, and to express. Kahn called the school an example of an institution which rose from the “desire” to learn:

Schools began with a man under a tree who did not know he was a teacher, discussing his realization with a few who did not know they were students. The students reflected on what was exchanged and how good it was to be in the presence of this man. They aspired that their sons also listen to such a man. Soon spaces were erected and the first schools became” [4].

What links institutions to the previous idea is the notion that inspirations and institutions are the perceptible points of order, of the existential world, and what Heidegger would call the basic forms of Being-in-the-world. The relationship of architecture to institution is that the former is first answerable to an institution of man (meaning, it must be explained within the idea of an institution), to a particular inspiration, before it becomes realized into a building. In other words, it cannot just be; it must respond to and must be generated from a meaningful collective essence before becoming a physical artifact. Also, Kahn attributes to the institution “form” and a spatial character (Kahn uses ‘form’ as a ‘perceivability’, as the precognition before it becomes physically realized; what it then acquires is shape).
While both of the above ideas speak of the existence of a metaphysical realm which determine the making of architecture, Kahn attempts to concretize it more by introducing the idea of “institutions”. If we are to re-define institutions as denoting the limited, perceivable “unit” of the collective reality of man, which have originated in his primordial condition, but which have been retained in the same, essential sense today, we can make a correspondence between “institutions” and “archetypes” as used by Jung to denote the recurrent, timeless entities man collectively identifies with.

Archetypes, or “institutions”, are the timeless landmarks in the landscape of reality which man has created as a result of his collective living. Man adhere to these ‘landmarks’ to give meaning to his existence, to set a matrix on which life operates. While these ‘landmarks’ have no material form, they have a certain spirit, and the general task of architecture is to continually pursue embodying that spirit.

While both Jung and Kahn talked of their concepts more as a universal human phenomenon transcending a particular cultural state, they becomes ambiguous and less precise when we raise the question whether the conception, manifestation and expression of the archetypes are not actually culturally conditioned, whether there is not a specific way “order” manifests in a place. To put it more simply, Kahn’s institution of learning may be universally comprehensible, but it has different manifestation in different places. Does Kahn see the same nature of order in different places? Does not a particular place have a particular way of conceiving the insitutions, understood universally in a generic sense, and thus a particular way of revealing them?

Another important issue is the physical materialization of the archetypal sense. How much of the archetypal sense is autonomous of the ‘real’ material objects, and how much of it is dependent on material organization? To take Kahn’s Sangsad Bhaban (National Assembly)
at Dhaka as an example: while the conjoining and the arrangement of the parts (the composition) and the spatial order ‘exude’ the archetypal sense of meeting, it is not yet certain whether the same ‘form-diagram’ could generate a radically different shape, or whether, to set a commonly raised question, the ‘form-diagram’ could not have adopted things other than concrete and the circular cut-outs? At the level of considering Bengalis as members of the human clan, Kahn’s interjection is most convincing, but when we speak of Bengalis as the people of Bengal/Bangladesh, it seems that the problem of arbitrariness still lurks in the strategy. This is to say that, a universal application has not found its place substantially.

Typology

The idea of type, and a typological understanding of architecture, has been at the center of a number of architectural thinking in recent times. What charges the various positions is not an unanimity about the notion of type but often completely differing attitudes.

The idea of type is fundamental to any activity if we consider type, simplistically, as a cognitive pattern. We unselfconsciously operate through type; we cannot think but through type. As Rafael Moneo says, “Architecture...is not only described by types, it is also produced through them. If this notion can be accepted, it can be understood why and how the architect identifies his work with a precise type. He is initially trapped by the type because it is the way he knows. Later he can act on it; he can destroy it, transform it, respect it. But he starts from the type. The design process is a way of bringing the elements of a typology - the idea of a formal structure - into the precise state that characterizes the single work” [5]. Micha Bandini also, in fathoming the depth of type, says, “To design...is to respond to the tradition of type and to the requirements of the programme. It is to this vague notion that most architects subscribe in their design activities” [6].

To introduce the notion of type we can begin by the definition given...
by Moneo, in his archaeology of typology, where he traces the first coherent and comprehensive formulation of the idea of type in the thinking of Quatremere de Quincy, and then its subsequent diversion in the strategy of Durand, in the major “modernists” and then its re-evaluation among contemporary Italians. Moneo says:

[Type] can most simply be defined as a concept which describes a group of objects characterized by the same formal structure. It is neither a spatial diagram nor the average of a serial list. It is fundamentally based on the possibility of grouping objects by certain inherent structural similarities. It might even be said that type means the act of thinking in groups [7].

We can now look at a more committed description of type given by one of its earliest proponents, Quatremere de Quincy:

The word “type” represents not so much the image of a thing to be copied or perfectly imitated as the idea of an element that must itself serve as a rule for the model.... The model, understood in terms of the practical execution of art, is an object that must be repeated such as it is; type, on the contrary, is an object according to which one can conceive works that do not resemble one another at all. Everything is precise and given in the model; everything is more or less vague in the type. Thus we see that the imitation of types involves nothing that feelings or spirit cannot recognize.... We also see that all inventions, notwithstanding subsequent changes, always retain their elementary principle in a way that is clear and manifest to the senses and to reason. It is similar to a kind of nucleus around which the developments and variations of forms to which the object was susceptible gather and mesh. Therefore a thousand things of every kind have come down to us, and one of the principal tasks of science and philosophy is to seek their origins and primary causes so as to grasp their purposes. Here is what must be called ‘type’ in architecture, as in every other branch of human inventions and institutions.... We have engaged in this discussion in order to render the value of the word type - taken metaphorically in a great number of works- clearly comprehensible, and to show the error of those who either disregard it because it is not a model, or misrepresent it by imposing on it the

7. Moneo.
24. J.N.L. Durand: graphical system for vaulted public buildings (1819-21), above; Sedad Hakki Eldem: plan types of “Turkish House” with outer hall (1930s), left; Franco Purini: classification, by sections, of architectural systems (1968), right.
rigor of a model that would imply the conditions of an identical copy" [8].

From the definition of de Quincy to contemporary attitudes, typology has been perceived, in the broadest sense, in two major ways: (1) as an analytical tool for the classification of urban and building morphology, and as a means for reading the city; and, (2) as a theoretical and material tool for the production of architecture. Building type, used in the sense of relating function to image, is the simplest attempt of classifying buildings. Also, a persistent and popular notion of type is in the iconographic sense: as an archive of easily appropriated icons, as ‘convenient repository of authoritative imagery waiting to be transformed by personal creativity’ [9], or again, as ‘a cultural icon that appears and circulates in society that is made identifiable and becomes, in turn, the ‘represented symbol’ [10].

The idea of architectural typology as an ‘archive’ of given types - architectural figures which have been reduced to their elementary geometrical nature [11] - probably begins with the exercise of J.N.L. Durand: the reduction of ‘forms’ and elements to their elemental geometry and their classification with the explicit purpose of compositional combinations. Moneo identifies this point as the beginning of the disappearance of the connection between type and form in European architectural discourse. Durand’s principle anticipated the later Neo-Classicist attitude of looking at ‘history as quarry of available material’. This not only fused type with model, but was more instrumental in persuading the “modernists” to avoid a historical perspective and overlook the significance of typology.

Although Durand used type more as a compositional tool for the production of architecture, there has been the other dominant notion of type, mostly among contemporary Italian architects, as a critical tool for urban analysis. Most of the adherents to this idea see typology as a means of ‘reading’ the city: as ‘a useful methodology in so far as it clarifies the process of the transformation of cities and allows urban phenomenon to be perceived both diachronically and

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8. Quatremere de Quincy, *Dictionnaire Historique de l'Architecture* (1832); Rossi discusses de Quincy extensively.


synchronically' [12]. Typology is seen as a tool to ground the 'mysticism' of architecture within a more rational and scientific discipline. It becomes a methodological device not only for understanding the relationship between urban morphology and building typology, but also to investigate the corresponding social, economic and political aspects. To Massimo Scolari, for example, typology is not a morphological game, but a “scientific tool to understand the dialectics of urban politics” [13]. Thus, type is not merely a neutral, analytical tool, nor a simple formal class, but a perceptible persistent structure overlaid with non-formal significance.

The Typology of Aldo Rossi

It is Aldo Rossi’s notion of typology, as developed over a number of years in close spirit to the ideas of De Quincy and Argan, which offers a crucial and intricate link between typology as ‘understanding’ (as the ‘analytical moment’) and as production, between theory and design. For us, it is the cultural dimension of type, an aspect which “archetype/institution” side-stepped, which is of special importance. As Rossi says:

...type is the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence. In spite of changes, it has always imposed itself on the “feelings and reason” as the principle of architecture and the city. ...(Type is) the structuring principle of architecture.... In fact, it can be said that this principle is a constant. Such an argument presupposes that the architectural artifact is conceived as a structure and that this structure is revealed and can be recognized in the artifact itself. As a constant, this principle, which we can call the typical element, or simply the type, is to found in all architectural artifacts. It is also then a cultural element and as such can be investigated in different architectural artifacts; typology becomes in this way the analytical moment of architecture, and it becomes readily identifiable at the level of urban artifacts. Thus typology presents itself as the study of types of elements that cannot be further reduced, elements of a city as well of an


13. Ibid.

The origin of a particular form is beyond our understanding. We can, however, observe the persistence of forms. Those that persist do so because they resonate so strongly in the experience of human beings that they are chosen again and again. Clear reasons for these choices cannot be articulated because such motives make up an elusive web of conscious and unconscious needs, desires and associations.

-Alexander Purves,
The Persistence of Forms.
The process of reduction is a necessary, logical operation, and it is impossible to talk about problems of form without this presupposition. In this sense, all architectural theories are also theories of typology, and in actual design it is difficult to distinguish the two moments [14].

Three aspects of Rossi’s observations can be highlighted from here:

(1) Type, being a cultural element, has its origin (in de Quincy’s sense) within both the myths and realities that form a cultural state.

(2) The idea that type is prior to and constitutive of realized form implies both a counteraction to the dilemma of arbitrariness in ‘form-making’, and the application of a rationality to what appears to be a whimsical process.

(3) Type is both a rational and poetic tool. It encompasses a diverse range: from the city as a physical fact, to memory in the imperceptible domain. The rational tool, what Rossi calls the ‘analytical moment’, allows, within a scientific discipline, to understand the relationship of urban morphology and building typology. As a design tool it engages the dimension of intangibility --the realm of both memory and poetry.

Archetype and Type

Will it be possible now to tie a strand through particular aspects of the notions of Kahn, de Quincy and Rossi that will bear some architectural rationalization of the previous meta-architectural discussions? Both the “institutions” of Kahn (Jung’s archetype) are entities through which certain human conditions intersect; Kahn primarily sees these as universal human “desires”, while de Quincy and Rossi will see them as cultural phenomena. Both archetype and type are loaded with the significance of recurrence, and both harbour the contour of a mythic origin or beginning; the former in the perspective of the human race, and the latter in the more localized condition of a culture-place. Their recurrence, or the need for their recurrence, can only be explained by a fundamental human need (but manifested in a different way culturally) to seek, within continuous change, a famili-
arity, a persistent mode which makes existence meaningful and coherent.

There are a number of coincidences within a more architectural sense also. Both Kahn and Rossi sense a 'pre-form' which precedes the actual realization; Kahn calls it "form", and Rossi gives type the status of determining the final morphology. To both, this ensures a method of countering the dilemma of arbitrariness. But, while Kahn's thinking is shrouded in an almost hermetic mysticism, Rossi adopts a much more 'rational and perceptible' system.

Again, in the case of Kahn, it is "circumstance" in a dialectical relationship with "pre-form" which determines the "shape" of the realized form. Thus, the original form, which is answerable to some "institutions" of man may be constant in its essence in the whole human history; its realization takes different shape with every new circumstance.

Similarly, type can be considered as an idealization which can never be realized in reality in toto; what gets realized is a transformation or deformation of the idealization. Thus, both the notions engage, as a dialectical necessity, the contradictory and inextricable pair of constancy and change.

Both Kahn and Rossi see architecture as the 'real' manifestation of the 'thought-out' world of man. While Kahn sees architecture as disclosing the order which pervades our experiential and existential world, Rossi sees architecture as the sign which reveals the relationship of human events in a particular place and time.
26. Typological study as the precursor to 'design', "City with cupola and towers", Aldo Rossi (1978).
Typology in Architectural Projects

The present chapter looks at how the notion of typology has been engaged in various ways within the design strategy of some contemporary works. The discussion is a brief attempt to reveal the range of manoeuvres in design which are based on a typological understanding. The discussion focuses on how the strategies encompass the problems the architects have confronted in the projects, and also how in various ways they engage some of the essences of “place-architecture” notion. The observations are introductory and partial since they are not critical reflections on the total work of the architects, and neither do they form a comprehensive ‘analysis’ of the projects themselves (both of which are beyond the scope of the present research).

I

The ideological concern of Aldo Rossi is clearly expressed in his architectural projects; the concern is generated, more than anything else, by the architectural and environmental conditions of the last fifty years or so. In brief, it is the dominance of non-communicative, self-referential forms in creating artifacts, on one hand, and the proliferation of such forms in building the cities and environment, on the other, which have instigated this ideological position. The state of “meaninglessness” and “alienation” in the environment has been sparked off, to a great degree, by the deployment of these forms. Rossi sees the role of typology as a major way of restituting meaning in the environment, because it is type, as discussed before, which harbours the ‘essential meaning’ of a place. And, it is type which, in such trying circumstances, can recover meaning for architecture.

The elementary school at Fagnano Olona, for example, located on the outskirts of a small Italian town, is organized on the basis of urban typologies that constitute a traditional European city. The ‘rational’ layout of the school reveals with an unfettered clarity the typological
27. Aldo Rossi, Elementary School at Fagnano Olona (1972-76).
origin of its elemental configuration. The central courtyard is clearly the urban piazza from which the corridor spread outwards as streets. The gymnasium, with its broad flight of stairs, is the large public edifice, while the library, by its unique cylindrical volume and particular way of siting, symbolizes an honorific role.

The Fagnano Olona project, like many other projects, is almost a ‘diagram’ of the type: elemental in its geometry, non-ambiguous in the arrangement of the parts, and ‘puritanically’ pure in its formal disposition. It seems, in his bid to restore meaning and significance to a place, Rossi rationally abstracts the absolute essence of the type; and, by representing it in its ‘primary and original condition’ and in a non-ambiguous manner, he wants the ultimate form to be clearly understood by everybody [1]. Since responding to bodily and tactile sensations can become a deterrent to the recognition of the type, communicative clarity becomes an issue of utmost priority; even circumstantial conditions are given lower priority. It may be because of this manner of rendition of type, with the exclusion of certain immediate perceptions, that gives Rossi’s built work represent a kind of reclusive and uncompromising starkness. In this sense, Rossi’s drawings become richer and more evocative images because, unlike a built project, they announce the possibilities of coming things.

II

While the general claim about “modernists” is their use of historically-disjunctive and self-referential forms, some of the works of Le Corbusier and Alvaar Aalto, for example, defy being located within this class. It is the adoption of typology, as a material and expressive tool in the design of these architects, that make their work overcome the shortcomings of “orthodox” modernism, and provide a cultural continuity instead of traumatic departure.

The use of typology in Le Corbusier’s work seems to be reverse of Rossi’s strategy. Unlike what we were led to believe, Le Corbusier
operated within a keen historical sense. His architectural principles were derived and developed from a direct ‘reading’ of both the past and its living present. Corbusier was quite aware of the collective significance and nature of each type; it was this knowledge which allowed him to ‘reinterpret’ the relationship with the past. The architectural modality of making this reinterpretation depended on the manipulation of the very structure of type. In Le Corbusier’s work, type was hardly directly rendered; it was the modification or contradiction of it which formed “the constant leitmotif in his work”[2]. Alan Colquhoun calls this way of manipulating type, a social and cultural given, as “displacement of concepts”. Colquhoun suggests that this is not a ‘creation in a cultural void’ but rather a dialectic process of reinterpretation where “the original practice and the new prescription constitute a paradigmatic or metaphoric set, and that new can only be fully understood with reference to the old, in absentia” [3].

Le Corbusier employed two major strategies in his final representation of type: Firstly, in the case of ‘institutional’ honorific building type, or elements of “high” tradition, Le Corbusier deliberately transformed, displaced or subverted the structure of the type to render its typological origin often incomprehensible. This was as much part of an ideological motivation as much a mode of representation. Secondly, Le Corbusier appropriated types which were from the “vernacular” domain, or from outside of “high” architecture, and, by giving them a new architectural and symbolic disposition which they have not previously possessed, ascribe to them a greater role within the range of architecture. This is what Kenneth Frampton calls the “monumentalization of the vernacular” [4].

In terms of responding to place, vis-a-vis typology, the Assembly building at Chandigarh provides an emblematic example of the first operation. Unlike projects in Europe, the Indian situation raised a number of fundamental questions. How can Le Corbusier, essentially embedded in European culture, provide an ‘authentic’ response to a distinctive culture as India? What is to be the contemporary architec-
tural mode when the traditions of India have been rendered peripheral by two centuries of dominating presence of a foreign culture? And, when the major existing mode, i.e. the colonial, is ideologically abhorred, what should be the terms of reference of a 'new' architecture?

In meeting the "desire" of assembly, Le Corbusier identified the honorific building type as his point of departure. In most cities of the sub-continent, the neo-classical "Palladian" building type has long formed a paradigm of honorific buildings. Such iconographic types, however, came to be associated with the colonial machinery - the bureaucracy and the administrative ruling 'deity'. Political independence in 1947 did not immediately change this semantic codification; the State Building in Bangalore, built in 1952, and although dressed in an "Indian" trimming, immediately related its iconographic and planimetric character to the British honorific type. When Nehru talked about a culture "unfettered by the traditions of the past", he meant primarily the immediate ones.

Le Corbusier understood this, and thus probably faced a dilemma. In the cultural climate of the 40s, with the sub-continent completely immersed in adopted and new types, and the traditional architectural culture badly traumatized, the question of an "Indian" typology, in the face of unprecedented urban utilities, seemed a distant cry. While the matter of excavating submerged types, or mediating cultural type with adopted functions, would be a matter of profound national and cultural issue (a matter someone deeply immersed in the culture could take up), it was forced upon Le Corbusier to contemplate on the European honorific type, as he naturally belonged to that tradition, and, at the same time, veer away at a critical point which makes that type identifiable with the colonial image.

One can discern two strategies in the design of the assembly: firstly, the identification of the honorific type which will have an iconographic prescience in India; and, secondly, conscious displacement, transformation and subversion of certain signs. The 'signs' of this
type are the symmetrical arrangement, the grand portico, the major spatial volume axial to the entry and the domical main space physically prominent on the exterior. Le Corbusier created displacement in all of these: the portico is detached and made independent from the main body; it is then transformed into an autonomous device, the parasol, injecting into it the idea of the traditional chattri. Unlike the axially in the type, the central space (assembly hall) is located in an eccentric manner, without a particular sense of organized procession. The dome here is not a dome but a hyperbolic paraboloid culled from industrial imagery. The subversion of the axially and equivocal domination of the ‘dome’ is further effected by the placing and shape of the lower assembly.

III

The typological perspective in Alvar Aalto’s work resulted from an acknowledgement of the significance of ‘culturally persistent forms’ and the need to bypass the representational arbitrariness of “orthodox” modernism. Implicit within this is also the idea that latching on to ‘persistent forms’ provides a kind of legitimacy and societal meaning to a work. Porphyrios, in connection with Aalto’s work, writes that a typological structuring establishes “a common visibility against which the profusion of forms can be sorted out, sanctioned, or discredited, for in it merge a peoples’s memories and daily experience” [5].

But, unlike Rossi, the final representation of the memorial form is not done in a puritanical and rigorous language. Here Le Corbusier and Aalto strike a commonality: both make an ambiguous rendition of type so that a range of associative images are invoked. But, unlike Le Corbusier, who would often ‘subvert’ the structure of the type, Aalto would rather operate within its structural coherence. How does Aalto achieve the interpretative richness in his work? Porphyrios adds: “By utilizing the associational richness of already operative and socially legitimized iconographic types, yet by refusing to render

5. Porphyrios D., The Retrieval of Memory: Alvar Aalto’s Typological Conception of Design
them complete and by always shortcircuited our fantasies with the introduction of superimposed iconographic references, Aalto cultivates the poetic aspect of language: that of polysemy (the manifoldness of levels of signification, the profusion of secondary and tertiary meanings)” [6].

The most emblematic example of Aalto’s typological gesture is the retrieval of the “city-crown” within the modernist vocabulary. The iconographic nature of the “city-crown” type, with the dome, the spire, the hierarchical dominance of the assembly hall in conjunction with the other volumes, has historically provided a symbolic and civic prominence to an important urban artifact. This, in turn, would provide the characterization of a particular city fabric.

The “city-crown” type remained as a distinct category in Scandinavian cities until it was identified as an anthem due to the ideological difficulty of “modernism” with “monumentality”. However, in the euphoric period of “modernism”, Aalto, in a number of projects dealing with public edifices, reinstated the iconographic nature of the “city-crown”. Obviously, the neo-classical mode was not adhered. In the Saynatsalo Town Hall, what was re-established within a completely different syntax was the visibility of relative hierarchy of the assembly chamber and the configuration of the whole complex which lent the status of a civic monument.

IV

The work of Sedad Hakki Eldem, in Turkey, serves as an appropriate model of typology as cultural resistance. In the 1930s and the 1940s, Turkey was deeply embroiled in a schism between a modernist culture ushered in Europe and a nationalistic fervour engendered by remembrance of the ‘golden days’ of the Ottoman empire. In architecture, the first manifested as the too well-known International Style, and the latter as formalistic replication of or quotation from Ottoman architecture, but mostly grafted on European planimetric building
types. To Eldem, both the attitudes served only a superficial purpose in architecture. Eldem, as much as he was convinced about the modernist state of mind and its possibilities, did not succumb unilaterally to the overwhelming placeless ‘internationalism’. Neither did he find the formal gestures of overt nationalism an enduring and profound process for restituting cultural continuity. To Eldem, typology became the essential tool to resist both, and to continue “the traditional patterns which would otherwise be extinct” [7].

In Eldem’s prolific career, there are two major ways in which the typological resistance have manifested: (1) as a painstaking documentation of major public and residential structures, and their classificatory analysis; and (2) as a conceptual origin of his compositional intention. “Type in the first sense serves as an ideal and becomes the symbol of Eldem’s life-long search; while type in the second sense equips him with an operational a-priori from which design can proceed” [8].

Eldem’s most remarkable contribution, to the Turkish architectural culture, is the articulation of the “Turkish” house type. This began as early as the 1930s, by his collection of the Plan Types of the Turkish House, despite the influential anti-historicist tendency in “orthodox” modernism then, through the documentation projects, and, in his relentless effort, to give a "concretized", yet contemporary, expression to a building type that has formed a part of the repository of the place.

It was Eldem’s contemporary representation of the “Turkish House” which made a convincing case of the struggle for cultural continuity within a contemporary consciousness. The essence of the “Turkish House”, which Eldem identified, is in its geometrical and planimetric configuration, in its skeletal and modular order, and in its ambiance of ‘lightness and transparency’. In its contemporary representation Eldem primarily resorted to a non-ambiguous 'rationalist' language, employing the internationally dominant resources and techniques of the time (e.g. reinforced concrete, etc.). In various projects, he also

31 Sedad Hakki Eldem, Agaoglu House, Istanbul (1936).
manipulated the spatial order of the type, transforming or reorganizing it, to make it consonant with current sensibility.

V

In Bangladesh, the formation of the architectural discipline, in the contemporary sense, began in the 1950s, almost from scratch. The previous 200 hundred years of English presence, which caused a deep fracture at all levels of society, relegated traditions of the place to a periphery of the new societal condition. The intellectual reawakening in Bengal, at the beginning of this century, constituted the earliest struggle to reclaim the essence of tradition but within the ‘reality’ of contemporary sensibility (the one generated through colonial conditions). While, in different disciplines, varying degrees of mediations were attempted, the condition of the architectural culture remained virtually unchanged.

The works of Muzharul Islam, for example, in the 1950s and later, were first and foremost attempts to institute a contemporary architectural paradigm in the post-colonial vacuum. The dual conditions of a pervading “internationalism” and of a socialistic political vision to restructure the post-colonial society led most intellectuals to formulate ideologies which ‘transcended’ the deeper ‘structure’ of place. Architects found in certain attitudes of “modernism” a representation of such ‘progressive’ ideology. The work of Muzharul Islam, monumental and epoch-making in its range of contribution, signified an adherence to this tendency.

The significant projects of this formative period showed many shared aspects with ‘modernist’ language and technology, but most importantly, a continuation of the abstract types, circulated internationally. If one were to cite certain characteristics it would be, for example, (1) a self-referential and assertive stance in mediating with the landscape or site, (2) a spatial, not to mention a historical disjunction with the context, (3) use of generally cuboid, monolithic mass ordered by an
a-priori geometry, and (4) a seeking of legitimacy by not through 'conventions', but through 'unfamiliarity'. While many of the projects are a demonstration of formal and spatial innovation, they are less forceful as memorial associations. Their mode of connection to the place, vis-a-vis control of climate, programmatic needs, material use, etc., is only peripheral to the ultimate meaning of architecture.

While these projects laid the basis of a discipline in a vacuous condition they were ultimately constrained in evoking the deeper notions of *place*. It is in some of the recent works that one finds, on one hand, varying degrees of distancing from 'borrowed' principles, and, on the other hand, the germs of burrowing deeper, of making an 'archaeological' excavation in the encrusting layers of imposing ideologies for a more “place-responsive” architecture.

Two recent projects, for example, provide a potentially instructive paradigm for a *place-evocative* architecture. Both the projects, the S.O.S. Children’s Village in a suburban location of Dhaka, by Raziul Ahsan and Muzaffaruddin Choudhury, and the S.O.S. Social Center in a rural setting of Khulna, by Uttam Kumar Saha, adopt typology as an ordering principle and, at the same time, as a tool for ‘archaeological’ retrieval. The *uthan* type, the one that is invoked in these projects, has been lost in the urban situation by the articulating method of making simple, monolithic cuboids, but which still forms a perennial way of organization in spontaneous and rural dwellings. The *uthan* type is characterized by the deployment of discrete, pavilion-like volumes around a courtyard — an “internalization” of an exterior space. The discrete volumes contain the space, and yet provide a spatial and environmental permeability.

While the *uthan* has been generally used for ordering individual dwelling units, in the case of the Children’s Village, it has been transposed to a condition of collective accommodation, and, in the case of the Social Center, in a communal structure. Both the projects employ other ‘typical’ devices in response to their geo-physical location. The Dhaka project is consciously articulated, in its relation-
ship to the street and in its formal ‘ambiguity’, to play its sub(urban) role, while the Khulna project, by its low-keyed stance, makes a sensitive interjection in the idyllic landscape. Also, both the projects reinstate ‘remembered’ roof types, vaulted in the urban and pitched in the rural condition, to form their specific roofscapes, yet within contemporary programmatic and constructional means.

Place, architecture and typology form an intricate triangular relationship. The conceptualization of any one is only clarified by the others. The significance of place has been elaborated earlier; it is through types that the identity of a place is perpetuated architecturally.

It is through type that the recurrence of things which are deeply part of a place occurs. Type is the essential tool by which the repository of a place can be tapped. Type, distinct from model which implies replication, demands a constantly contemporary way of representation. Thus, type has inscribed within it the range of both continuity and change.
5

Reflections
This investigation began simply as a concern for a more empathic architectural syntax in the specific context of Bangladesh. The concern is not unique. This is part of a global concern, particularly in 'traumatized' nations, to find a more "appropriate" expression for architecture. In addition to the particular interest in Bangladesh, two general conclusions emerge: firstly, architecture, to legitimize its production, is frantically in search of an 'authentic' authority; secondly, immersed in such basic dilemmas, architecture is now probably distanced from its fundamental role.

In the course of the thesis research, one conclusion led to another. The trajectory of the investigation began to stumble on new ground. It seemed that the expression 'an architecture which is out of place' or 'an architectural proposition finding its place' is more than an issue of stylistic and formal adjustment, or utilitarian or aesthetic propriety. It raises fundamental issues about the role and capacity of architecture. It also seems that the simple notion of place has inscribed within it matters of profound, yet elusive, nature. Apparently, architecture and place are deeply entwined together.

It became important at that junction to dwell on the notion of place. By place is meant not just a geographical terrain or a particular site; it means the space man wrests from the infinite space, which he possesses, and where he enacts his collective life. Place, in a more complex sense, becomes the domain of 'existential structure and meaning' which provides not only collective identity but also a kind of psychic security. It is Christian Norberg-Schulz's view that it is the purpose of architecture to "concretize" this existential dimension. Further, in the geo-psychic formation of place, three components are in play: terrain, time and human events. We could also say that place is the terrain in which events have a contiguous meaning among its dwellers. For Aldo Rossi, architecture is a sign which reveals this triangular confluence. For both Norberg-Schulz and Rossi, architec-
ture has a revelatory role: it "exteriorizes" certain latent and immeasurable conditions of collective life.

In 'organic' societies, the relationship of architecture and place is implicitly worked out, but in most societies today, compounded as they are with multiple consciousnesses, some of them imposed from outside, the bond is lacerated. Architecture then is made to involve itself only with the peripheral or temporal requirements of a culture: the immediately tangible, the physical. It would not be too exaggerated to assert that recent enquiries into architecture have given too little conscious thought to this dimension of architecture. Can we say that 'placelessness', rampant as it is today globally, and the abstract games of most recent architectural production support this contention?

Historical enquiries into architecture were mostly involved with constructing grand schemes and great monoliths, in painfully stitching a commonality over a wide expanse of cultures and places, and consequently resorting to abstraction and reduction. In this reductive process what was gained was the formation of certain lowest common denominators which could be used to survey and comprehend diverse phenomena, but what was subsumed, if not lost, were those aspects sidestepped as anomalies in the grand schemes but which may have actually formed the essential qualities of place.

To come back to the idea of the totality of our reality being made up of both the tangible and the intangible, of the physical and the psychic: Carl Gustaf Jung's investigations in psychology suggested that there is a vast, untractable domain in our minds, which he called the "collective unconscious", that constitutes a significant portion of our reality, our 'existential' world. Now, if we can ascribe to architecture the role of "concretizing" this existential dimension we can see a closer relationship between architecture and the "collective unconscious".

That architecture cannot be fully comprehended in only body-intel-
lect terms [2], and that the essence of architecture lies in meta-
architectural realms, these issues have preoccupied a number of
contemporary thinkers. One thinks of the early explorations of
Lethaby. Louis Kahn's philosophical ideas came even closer to this
realization. These deliberations raise the question: if a great portion
of our reality is in the psychic realm, how do we make it palpable
enough to provide new insight into architecture, and specially in the
domain of design? If such notions, by their intrinsic nature, elude
verbalization how can we engage them consciously into architecture?

A return to the notion of Place will probably open up some possibili-
ties. To repeat: Place is a geo-psychic realm, which means the
formation of place occurs as much as in the physical terrain as in the
collective mind. It is this intrinsic association, of the physical
landscape with the ‘landscape of the mind’, which runs as a constant
factor through all categories of understanding place. Further, a place
is the terrain where this association has a contiguous significance for
its dwellers. To describe it as a realm also means it has an edge; it is
a container. In this idea of containment, place also becomes a
repository of both artifacts and of human events. E.V. Walter, in
Placeways, recalls Plato’s doctrine of Place as “the active receptacle
of shapes, powers, feelings, and meanings, organizing the qualities
within it, energizing experience.” [3]

Artifacts and human circumstances are inextricably linked; their
qualities are severely reduced if conceived and explained autono-
mously. Artifacts are the physical manifestation of human circum-
stance. They are the autographs of human events. And human events
are not irregular, incoherent and accidental occurrences; they con-
tantly refer to the “existential structure” which men in a collective
condition in a particular place have formulated. The “existential
structure” provides meaning and relevance to human events.

“Artifacts” are inserted in the natural landscape making the landscape
of the mind more tangible and comprehensible. “Artifacts” thus have
an important relationship to our shapeless, wordless world of the
mind, and give more meaning to our existence than we have generally ascribed to it. This is what Kahn implied by saying that “Art is the threshold between Silence and Light.”

A particular work of architecture arises out of a contemporary human circumstance. At the moment of its inception, while it answers the current circumstance, it also recalls the total collection of typical circumstances that form the place in which the work is to be set; at the same time, at that moment of recalling, it also conjures the typical corresponding “artifacts”. It is in this back and forth movement that the contemporary “artifact” is conceived and crafted. By doing so, the “artifact” and the “circumstance” make another addition to the ‘place receptacle’. More important, by doing so, the work of architecture evokes the place from whence it was generated.

What has been innocently introduced here, but which holds the architectural ‘instrumentality’ of pinning down some of the intangible dimensions of the discussion, is the typical circumstance, the typical artifact; in short, the type. Type is not a classification of building functions, it is not a pattern-book of plans, nor it is a collection of ‘Froebilian’ tools for making convenient combinations, it is much more. The notion of type could be understood fundamentally in two ways: (1) it has no replicable form or shape, but “the type is a sort of kernel around and in accordance with which the variations that the object is susceptible of are ordered” [4]; and, (2) it is essentially a condition of recurrence of objects and things out of the infinite repository of things which make up a place.

In type is inscribed a number of things. By its recurrence a deep bond with the past is constantly created, “forming a kind of metaphorical connection with the moment when man [in a particular place], for the first time, confronted the problem of architecture and identified it in a form” [5]. Yet, every moment of the recurrence is actually a new representation of the original condition.
How can this be grounded in the context of Bangladesh? In what has been called the ‘amnesiac’ condition of architectural culture, when the recent compression of ‘adopted’ consciousness submerged the original nature of place, a typological investigation can become both an archaeological and an architectural tool: on one hand, it can excavate the recurrent mode and provide the “restitution of decayed intelligence”[6], and, on the other hand, furnish the material tools for design strategies. When the present architectural culture is condemned to loiter in the alley of arbitrariness, typology can provide, from it, a creative escape.
Postscript: A "Beginning"

"Where, or when, or what is a beginning?" [1]

A “beginning”, as a viable human enterprise, can be contemplated in two ways. Firstly, as the commencement of an enterprise which, by consciously rejecting or departing from a particularly understood mode, promises the making of a new watershed; Edward Said tells us what are the conditions that identifies this beginning: “First of all, there must be the desire, the will, and the true freedom to reverse oneself, to accept thereby the risks of rupture and discontinuity; for whether one looks to see where and when he began, or whether he looks in order to begin now, he cannot continue as he is...” [2]

The second notion of “beginning” implies a return -a re-awakening of a certain mode which has happened before, possibly many times; and every time it echoes the happening of the first time, probably a mythic, intangible, unknown origin. Every such awakening is in a way a return to the primordial beginning. Kahn probably meant this when he said: “I love beginnings, I marvel at beginnings. I think it is beginning that confirms continuation. If it did not -nothing could be or would be” [3].

The first idea, the departure from the previous, is reinforced when it is conjoined with the second, the idea of a return, a recurrence. The first idea falls short of being just simply a novelty by its concurrence with the second. And the second, too, does not degenerate into ‘frozen’ replication because it is charged by the first. Edward Said, in continuing his contemplation on “beginnings”, points out the difficulty of beginning with a wholly new start. He gives a compelling example: “When the Old Testament God chooses to begin the world again he does it with Noah; things have been going very badly, and since it is his prerogative, God wishes a new beginning. Yet it is interesting that God himself does not begin completely from nothing. Noah and the ark comprise a piece of the old world initiating the new world” [4]. All substantial ideas in architecture have come out of the

1. Edward Said, Beginnings
2. Said.
3. Louis Kahn.
34. Typological explorations: dwelling (above), honorific building (below).
conjoining of these two: departure and recurrence, memory and invention.

Place is a geo-psychic location.
Place is a continual repository of both “artifacts” and “events”.
A recurrence recalls the type (archetype) out of that repository.
A work of architecture is an “artifact” which is the sign of a human event.
An architecture that dwells between recurrence and departure adds a new deposit to that repository.
Most importantly, it is generated by and contributes to the evocation of that “place”.

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.”  [5]

There are signs, in the amnesiac architectural culture of Bangladesh, of a new “beginning”.

5. Eliot, *Four Quarters*. 
Selected books
(the references which were of particular importance to the investigation are asterisked)


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Harries, Karsten. *Thoughts on a Non-Arbitrary Architecture*,
Perspecta, Volume 20, 1983.


Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 3: Michell, G. The Islamic Heritage of Bengal.
Fig. 5: A.K.A.A., Architecture and Identity.
Fig. 6: Lobell, Between Silence and Light.
Fig. 7: Rossi, The Architecture of the City.
Fig. 9: Kagal, C. Vistara.
Fig. 10: Norberg-Schulz, Genius Loci.
Fig. 15, 17, 18:
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Fig. 16: Grover, The Architecture of India.
Fig. 22: A.K.A.A., Regionalism in Architecture.
Fig. 23: Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture.
Fig. 24: Bandini, AA Files 6, and Sedad Hakki Eldem.
Fig. 25: Rossi, Dissegni.
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   Bickford, Aldo Rossi.
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Fig. 29: Global Architecture, Saynatsalo Town Hall.
Fig. 30, 31:
   Bozdogan, Ozkan and Yenal, Sedad Hakki Eldem.
Fig. 32: Courtesy of Uttam Kumar Saha.

Illustration at the front:
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